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# Coda

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# SPIRITUAL UNITY Albert Ayler

Mister A A of Grade  
Double A Sounds  
by TED JONES

A is the first word in a jazz dictionary. It could stand for Armstrong the Satchmo, Ammons the Albert of piano, and it could mean Albert Ayler. All these grade A musicians of creation extraordinaire, are double A: Afro-Americans. They like thousands of other musical brothers pay or paid some very heavy dues just to continue doing their most natural thing, that of spreading spiritual unity through joyful music. They are sorcerers of sound. What they tell us on their horn is a "sound poetry" that causes us to re-act. Our reaction depends upon how we face the truth coming from a humble black sorcerer. He does not compromise when creating these sound poems. Because he is only a "bringer" of these awful truths that we sometimes fear. These truths are often hard on our guilty or dumb ears. In spite of our unhip response to the sounds of such sorcerers as Albert Ayler, Ernie Henry, Eric Dolphy, early Bird, etc. their sounds did begin to contaminate healthy, those commercially wealthy "soul'd oubt" musicians. The truth can influence even the devil, you dig.

I first heard the sorcerer Albert Ayler in Denmark, in a jazz club that was supposed to be the "hippest" club in Scandia. I fell in the club early. It was already kinda crowded. All the "jazz critics" (white) were up front. All the pretty Miss Anns (fay bitches) were on hand to dig and be dug by the black cats of music. I sat at the bar next to the great black musical daddy; Albert Nicholas. He was busy talking to some young grey boys about wooden reeds and plastic reeds. On the bandstand there were four men. Three black men and one white one. The white



one was Gary Peacock a bass player. I had never heard of him. The trumpet player was Don Cherry, who I knew from Ornette Coleman's first Apple exposure in '59. The drummer was busy setting up his rickety set of cheap drums. When he sat down to play, even with Danish cap and shades on, I knew it was none other than Sunny Murray. The "leader" of the group was a tenor sax man, by the name of Albert Ayler. I had heard of him through the Scandanavian press. They had wrote putdown articles about this man's musical truth. They had also had their cartoonists to ridicule this man, by drawing pictures of his tenor sax with a donkey's head. The Scandanavian "jazz critics" (whites) didn't dig this man's truth. What he was putting down was too blatant, too crude, for their unhip rational ears to bear. I sat at the bar waiting for the four men to start their first set. I turned to say something to Albert Nicholas, and then like an unheard of explosion of sound, they started. Their sound was so different, so rare and raw, like screaming the word 'FUCK' in Saint Patrick's Cathedral on crowded Easter Sunday. Albert Nicholas' handstrembled, causing his beer to spill. The two grey boys turned white as clean sheets on a wedding bed. Then all of a sudden their faces were fire-engine red and wet. The entire house was shook up. The loud sound didn't let up. It went on and on, growing more powerful as it built up. It was like a giant tidal wave of frightening music. It completely overwhelmed everybody. Some of the Danes responded with their rude whistling, others shouted at the musicians to shut up. I sat shocked, stoned, and amazed by what I was witnessing. Their music was unlike anything that I had heard before. That is to say, their music was a sound of sounds presented in a different way. It was NOT chaotic, nor psychotic. It was and still is (for me) a truth marching right on in. Into my very soul. It cleansed me, got rid of stagnation, and pollution. And Albert Ayler's solos, which were like prayers, telling and pleading with me to live better. His solo prayer poems were offering that audience a final, and I do mean FINAL soul-lution. Of course, only a few could grasp what the brother was screaming in their faces. I cried that evening, like a man being reborn in a traditional ritual in Africa, or down South church bit.

They played their first "tune" for about fifteen minutes, then without warning they just stopped. Just like that! Albert Ayler, a small black man with a curious beard, half black and half white, came to the mike and said in a very soft humble voice: "We thank you." Then they played the now famous "free anthem" Bells. It was so warm, pleasant, and strong. No schmaltzy bull shit. No cool blue faggoty come on, naw, uhuh just strong unwrong music. Pure black power of sounds. All kinds of good things happened as each musician took a term to "bring a bit" home to us. Even Gary Peacock said something wise as well as rhythmical that Copenhagen night. It was that first A A night that set me right. It started Albert Nicholas to dig and redig his younger black brothers blowing.



I do believe that it was because of Albert Ayler that brother Nicholas was seen nightly in Paris at Archie Shepp's gig in '67. Albert Ayler spread out his spiritual sounds for all to rejoice in. I dug the group every night. The management finally let the cats go, due to fast disappearance of paying customers. I was guilty of "nursing" one bottle of beer for four hours, you dig.

I got to know Albert when the club gig was finished. He told me about the French military sounds that he heard while serving Sam's war machine. He dug its honesty in simplicity. The French national anthem, which he called "La Mayonnaise" was one of his favorites too. Albert and his brother had also got some solid soul training in his father's church. The early bop era he dug, but it soon became "too just white to be right". Can you dig it? He told me about a mysterious recording that he had cut a long time ago in Sweden. That was the time that he came up to Scandia while in Sam's war machine. He scared a few people then too. But some Scandinavians are so hung up on black people that mostly any black cat can get a chance to do HIS thing at least once. So Albert Ayler cut his first recording with an all-white group. But there was no spiritual unity within the group. They were just there on "an also ran" basis. Albert was the everything on that first recording. The second disc was cut in Denmark, or recorded in Sweden and sold to a Danish dealer. It had a black musician on drums, but he was just as sad and OUT OF PLACE as the white ones on that second recording of Ayler. Even Denmark's best bass player Niels-Henning Orsted Pedersen wasn't hip enough to "hear" what Ayler was saying. Bye Bye Black Bird should be required listening to by all students of music, DAILY. Ayler played another tribute to Bird on that same date. He did Bird's Now's The Time. Both very symbolic and in respectful good taste. I am quite sure that Bird the sorcerer dug it. Can you dig it?

After the Copenhagen scene I didn't see brother Ayler until a few months later, when he fell into Amsterdam, on a very low paying gig. He still had the same group. That was Don on trumpet (pocket trumpet), Sunny Murray on drums, and Gary Peacock on bass. I was doing my jazz 'n' poetry bit with the Belgian guitarist Rene Thomas and a Dutch rhythm section. I had already tried to "hip" the Holland hipsters to A A. But they were hung up in their "we've heard everythingism" and paid no heed to my prefacing. That Amsterdam opening night for brother Ayler's group had a star studded crowd. There was Don Byas who blew some fabulous tenor solos that night. Erroll Garner and his drummer and bassist. But they were not allowed to play because they were contracted to do a concert that next night at the Concerto-Gebouw. I had been shacking up with Holland's finest hipstress Eliz Van de Mei. I had turned her onto Albert through heavy rapping when I came down from Scandia. She called up all her hip Holland friends. They all were there, including the dean of Dutch hipsters, Micheal

de Ruyters. One of the few white critics that I can listen to for any length of time. The club was packed, half the audience were musicians. I declined to come on first. I KNEW THE SCORE. So Albert's group went on first. B L A M! Just like in Denmark. But this time the group seemed more rough, crude, and free-er. The audience was amazed. They finally exploded with a very loud nervous applause. There were smiles on their double Dutch faces. The chicks' eyes were shining like wolves in a chicken house. They were really ready to give away some drawers that evening. The music was not chaotic, but erotic (to them)! The British jazz critic (white) Micheal James saw that I seemed to be one of the few who really knew what was REALLY GOING DOWN. He came over and sounded me. We rapped, yes'd, no'd and he cut out on a "may be so'd". I told him to read what the blacks in the United States were doing, and then he'd be hip to what was happening on this stage here in Amsterdam. At that time, it was one of our first of a series of "long HOT summers", you dig. After brother Albert's first set I came on with Rene Thomas' group. I had to do everything to Take Care of Biz after what brother Albert had Put On Them hunky Hollanders. I failed to cut through their heated and loud discussions. The group played just three sound-poems that night, but converted almost all of the audience.

The Dutch try to always "keep-in-touch" with the "far-out" or avant garde. Those same so-called devoted "hip jazz lovers" are now supporting and have been supporting every pop group that cuts a best seller. Even the bitch I had turned on to brother Ayler's sounds, Eliz Van de Mei. She ups and comes to Amerika where she was befriended by practically all the young black music sorcerers. Because she was hip and had my recommendation. She even became an important P.R. chick and booking agent. White people always give gold and gold getting gigs to their own kind, you dig. Well anyway, she has now joined the unhippest bag of hippies in Amerika. All the bread she made from jazz, she now spends on unworthy untalented and unhip humans called appropriately: hippies. We used to call (in the beboppers era) anybody that was coming on wrong or pretending to be something he was not, a hippy, you dig.

After brother Ayler did his thing, which was an OUR black thing in Amsterdam. I didn't see him again until he returned to Europe with a new group in The Newport Jive Festival, you dig. It was a "jive" caper pulled by Lenny the Feather's friend Georgie Wein. I was just packing up, getting ready to go back to Africa, when I stopped for an erotic flop in Rotterdam. And there on a concert hall poster was that magic A A name. Wow was I happy to see that good news. So I just waited for brother A A to arrive in this city that Adolf The Great had once destroyed physically. Now I wanted to witness A.A. destroy their superiority mentality in music. They came to "put down" Brother Ayler and his group. But once again A.A. was the victor through direct truth that brought joy which caused love. This group was really

something else, for even me. Not only was brother Ayler happening in a hundred unheard of directions. But he surprised me with an entire new group. There was his brother, Don, whom I had only heard on recordings. There was this drummer, a cute black cat, by the name of Beaver Harris and another, yes ANOTHER white bass player. I forgot his name, I think it was Bill Folwell. He didn't or couldn't take care of bass biz like Gary Peacock had done. But he was up there going through the motions, you dig.

After the Newport Jive gig, the youthful Dutch jazz dealer Paul Karting invited the group down to his tiny jazz club. Him thought him would get some free sounds "free". Him thought him would make more money from free music being blown "free" of charge. But A A and his group didn't blow a note that night. I just read my poems to honor A A and his new group. There was something else about that Rotterdam Newport deal, big brother Sonny Rollins was on the same billing and so was Illinois Jacquet. Two of the BIG bosses of the tenor saxophone. Illinois I had dug in the screaming late Forties and early Fifties. The Flying Home days. Them good old "blow-yo-horn-days", yeah! I remember how Illinois used to really knock the crowd of brothers and sisters out with his screams, honks, and higher than the moon sounds. But brother Ayler had a different approach to that powerful black sound breaking. And big bruz, Sonny Rollins, too, has his own wise witty way of "bringing sound".

A week later we all met in Paris. Albert and his group really tore jazz Paris apart. First of all, the French jazz critics (white) have always considered themselves of knowing, more about jazz, than even the musicians that play it. The music of Albert Ayler was unlike what they expected "avant-garde" jazz to be. Critics Gilson and Lemoison (white) turned on brother Ayler as though they owned the rights of jazz. These arrogant motherfuckers tried like all hell invested in them, to crush this "new Thing" as though it was an evil black plague. True it was contagious, and it did contaminate some of the younger French musicians. But it burst out on France as an explosion of goodness. Spiritual unity the music cried. On stage at the Salle Pleyel that night Albert's group was joined by a young Dutch Jew with his violin, Micheal Sampson. He had studied the traditional European violin techniques and it all had been shattered after he heard brother Ornette Coleman. He sat in with Ornette in Amsterdam, and now he was still in his parasitic-bag by intruding on Ayler's scene. But he didn't disturb brother Albert, naw sir. Brothers Albert and Don just took care of their musical biz like Sampson wasn't even there. That night brother Don blew some of the strongest and longest horn that I had heard. He blared his bugle like sound across that audience, causing boos, cat-calls, and the rude whistling that Youropee-ins do in derision. The audience was in a chaotic turmoil. French television was on hand filming the show. They asked me, who was standing back stage: "What

kind of jazz is this stuff?" I sounded them: Black! After the first tune (sic), the group struck into their sound-poem which has ghosts of the "La Mayonnaise" in it. Plus it has a bit of military march in it. The French dug it. They screamed and applauded. They thought "at last we are on familiar grounds". But Albert fooled them. After stating the theme (sic), the group stopped. Just like that, baby. Stop, bop!! The group walked off to shouts of: encore, please more, don't stop, not now! It was like a chick shoving a cat off at climax time, you dig? Albert came off that first Paris stage with a big sweaty smile across his face. We all went into their cold crowded dressing room. There we discussed the happenings. Edgar Sampson was tickled pink. Bill Folwell the bass player was uncommitted to what had just happened. Don and Beaver were cool and happy. Albert and I overjoyed. What had really happened was that George Wein had given Albert a big anxious signal to come off the stage. But Albert didn't "heed his jive master". So he started the last sound, then cut it, just like that. It was great timing and wonderful showmanship for that "over-hip" French audience.

We all cut out of the theatre for the Left Bank. Don inquired why should we be going to a "bank" at this night hour. Bill Folwell had to lug his bass along. The group hadn't been paid, thus no bread for a taxi. And taxis at that Paris hour are too too dear to even dream of. We all walked. Across the Etoile and down Champs Elysees. Albert laid all his ESP discs on me the next day. I played them daily and all the Left Bank that passed Hotel Stella heard the sounds of Ayler. The concierge got converted. He cut a tape of the recordings. After Ayler's musical contamination of the French jazz scene, Paris was not the same. He had done it, really DONE IT. Some of the older black musicians who had been living in Europe for years, complained about what Ayler and his group had laid on Paris. They felt their domain threatened. They thought that their fickle French audiences would expect them to do an Ayler music change. Uproars were all over the scene. Jazz magazines, newspapers, and the cafes discussed Albert Ayler. The record shops didn't have any of his ESP discs at that time. White marketing of Albert sounds were making money. I was offered a handsome sum. But I wouldn't sell my Albert Ayler discs at any price. My jazz angels cannot be prostituted off like pop singers. They are men of greater music and of greater dignity, because they come out a deeper dark people's bag.

After the Paris gig I didn't see brother Ayler in Europe anymore. When I broke my own self-exile from the U.S.A., I ran into him in Harlem, New York. Saxophonist Charles Tyler and I were strolling down a crowded late summer night Seventh Avenue, when we ran into Albert and his brother Don. They were just strolling in the night too. So we all decided to stroll together. I told Albert and the guys about a great blues singer that I had heard at The Harlem Festival of Jazz. She was supposed to be appearing nightly at a club

on Seventh Avenue. So they had eyes and off we went to dig her. We fell into the club, it was crowded. The waiter got us a seat near the bandstand where an organ-guitar group was doing their commercial-nothingness. The waiter took our order and went to get the drinks. When he returned with the drinks and asked for the payment, I alone had money to pay for the drinks. So once again I was witnessing America's economical mistreatment of her greatest creators. Albert Ayler, Don Ayler, and young Charles Tyler, all excellent musicians, but without one dollar between them. Shame on the U.S.A. Shame on the so-called jazz fans, jazz magazines, and jazz recording companies. Shame on anybody in the jazz business except those who play the music. Jazz musicians must be paid. They should be receiving all the rewards of their wonderful unselfish music. Albert Ayler gave and gave and continued to give to the world. Yet there he was, in Harlem, New York, broker than he had been in Denmark where I first dug him. I never got to hear Albert blow in the States, but heard his brother Don. Don did a duo with a bass player. He blew only prayers around Harlem. His statement was: "Mankind is so un-kind to his OWN-kind." This statement should be posted in every jazz club in the world.

The last time that I saw brother Albert Ayler was on the corner of 125th and Eighth Avenue, on the sunny side of that famous thoroughfare of Black America. Albert was with a chick, a beautiful black chick. In spite of it being hot and the sun was beaming down, Albert and she were dressed up in what seemed to me winter clothing. Albert was wearing a velvet suit, ascot tie, and beaver hat. He was perspiring buckets of sweat. His beard was glistening with the beads of sweat that were catching the reflections of the colorful Harlem people and traffic that passed by. That unusual beard of his, black and half white. It was like a symbol of his music. It was for both worlds to dig, really dig. His beard like his music was a poetic love cry for spiritual unity. The positive and the negative. The soul and the body. All the good traits and manners found in this one man, this one black tenor, alto, and soprano saxophone playing giant. Albert the Grand (The Great) the French have called him. Yes, he was Albert the great, but much greater than ally all realize. Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Johnny Hodges, Eric Dolphy, Ernie Henry, and the father of the rhythmical reeds: Coleman Hawkins, these men, these Afro-American musical creators of jazz innovations, who are now in that jazz haven (musical heaven). They will welcome brother Albert Ayler in their double A reed section. Brother Albert Ayler, Mister A.A., of grade double A sounds, is now a living ghost amongst us. And if we listen (the key to all jazz) and listen and listen and continue to listen with open everything, we will soon hear the ghost of AA in every grade AA reed section or brass section or even string section in all the contemporary music sections on earth. "Angels of jazz, they don't die, they live, in hipsters like you and I."

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