



**Peter Niklas Wilson**

# **S p i r i t s R e j o i c e !**

**Albert Ayler  
and his message**

**translated into English by Jane White**

wolke

To Walter Lachenmann

The publisher would like to express its sincere thanks to both our dedicated translator Jane White and to Gordon Lobban, who provided the impetus for the creation of this English edition and supervised it to its conclusion.

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ALBERT

THE FIRST GREAT PAST FROM THE FAST GENERAL  
PASTS WAS ALWAYS MID MELODY IS ALWAYS MID  
MELODY

TIMBRE FETTERS SPLINTERED THE LENGTH OF  
HISTORICALLY GNAWN

INVOCATION IN NO OLD KNOWN SENSE, THIS  
TRANSMISSION REMARKABLY IMPOSSIBLE TO  
SIEVE

WHATEVER IT WAS TURNED AGAINST HIM  
ATTEMPTING TO SHED ITS OWN ILLUSIONS  
AND WHOLLY INCAPABLE OF INTERFERING  
WITH HIS APPROACHES TO A WITHDRAWING  
EARTH

IT'S THE EXPOSED PULP CHAMBERS DELIVERS  
US TO AN INSTANTANEOUS NO-NAME BASIS

AREAS OF ACCUMULATED SWEAT UNRELATED  
ANATOMICALLY BUT RELATIVE IN THEIR  
HUMILITY: ice-cold cigarette

I'm telling!

Paul Haines

## Preface

"I still regard it as the jazz equivalent of the chimpanzee paintings that are said to have fooled some art critics many years ago. Ayler's squeaks, yodelling, and carryings-on (much of this sounds like New Year's Eve in Times Square) are either the work of a dastardly clever joker or a lucky amateur." This is the opinion of a critic writing in *Stereo Review* magazine, not in 1965, but rather in April 1992, on the occasion of the rerelease of the CD of Ayler's 'Love Cry' (according to the aforementioned critic, quite simply "an audio nightmare"). This is not an isolated opinion. Stanley Crouch, who wrote eulogies to Ayler's music in the 70s, now rejects it as amateurish and simplistic. To this day, Ayler has been denied the timeless classic status, which avant-gardists like John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy and Ornette Coleman finally achieved. Ayler's music remains controversial. For some he was a prophet, for others a charlatan, though there is very little doubt that he left an enduring legacy. No one who played with him was left untouched by the experience. Most of those he played with recognise that he profoundly changed their lives. And many who listened to him also fell under his spell. Would the music of a Peter Brötzmann, Charles Gayle, Frank Wright, David S. Ware, Roscoe Mitchell or Evan Parker be conceivable without his inspiration?

As controversial as Ayler remains to this day, the basis for a factual discussion of his contribution to the music of the 60s is thin. Following Ekkehard Jost's sound analytical remarks in his book 'Free Jazz' (1975) and Valerie Wilmer's basic biographical observations in 'As Serious As Your Life' (1977) very little more has been written about Ayler and many aspects of his life, his music and its intellectual (and spiritual) background remain obscure – impetus for this study, which follows on from these works.

A quarter of a century after Ayler's death it is not easy to shed light on these unknown areas. In the intervening years many of Ayler's former friends and musician colleagues have died or disappeared into obscurity. Call Cobbs, Henry Grimes, Beaver Harris and Charles Tyler are no longer alive; Earle Henderson and Norman Howard are untraceable. Mary Parks (alias Mary Maria), Ayler's last partner, and Arlene Ayler, his (divorced) wife, refuse all contact. I was only

able to contact Edward Ayler, Albert's father, and his brother Donald after much research. Their recollections and information were invaluable and I thank them for their kindness and friendly welcome in Cleveland. For Ayler's career since 1960 I was fortunate to be able to speak to an array of his contemporaries, without whose helpfulness, indeed enthusiasm, this book would not have been possible: Amiri Baraka (Newark/New Jersey), Paul Bley (Cherry Valley/New York), Bobby Few (Paris), Bill Folwell (Belleaire/Florida), Joel Freedman (Westport/Connecticut), Jon Goldman (Cleveland/Ohio), Milford Graves (Queens/New York), Paul Haines (Fenelon Falls/Canada), Bill Hess (Tenns Grove/New Jersey), Stafford James (Paris), Leroy Jenkins (Brooklyn/New York), Howard Johnson (New York), Sunny Murray (Paris), Gary Peacock (Claryville/New York), Lloyd Pearson (Cleveland/Ohio) Michel Samson (Louisville/Kentucky), Bernard Stollman (Kingston/New York), John Szwed (New Haven/Connecticut), John Tchicai (Davis/California), Bob Thiele (New York), Steve Tintweiss (Queens/New York), Henry Vestine (Eugene/Oregon) and Tony Viscomi (Easton/Pennsylvania).

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Peter Niklas Wilson

## Preface to the English edition

Music has always been important to me but the joys of listening to jazz came later. From adolescence to middle age a bubbling brew of British prog rock, jazz rock, West Coast experimentation and the music of Shostakovich fuelled my listening. Electric period Miles Davis was my entry point. A door opened into a vast, complex musical world. Navigation was not easy, with hundreds, thousands even, of new avenues to explore; a lifetime of fresh listening lay ahead.

Then one day, out of nowhere, Albert Ayler burst in. I'd heard nothing like this before. Who was this man? Musically, where did he come from? Why did I find his playing so exhilarating? Sleeve notes gave glimpses into his life and work. These often stressed how important a figure he was in the ongoing development of jazz but information was very hard to come by; I could find nothing which was widely available in print, only references to a few articles in long unavailable jazz magazines or academic papers.

By chance I discovered that, indeed, a book had been written about the life and work of Albert Ayler, but only published in the German language. Years passed; retirement arrived; Covid 19 arrived; lockdowns arrived and one dark, Scottish winter's day in December 2020 I decided to pursue the idea of having this book published in the English language. Shelves groan under the weight of books on the "Giants of Jazz", to have so little on such a seminal figure as Albert Ayler seemed, to me, almost criminal.

I am very grateful to Peter at Wolke Verlag for taking on the re-publication project and to Jane White for translating the original text. My sincere gratitude and thanks goes to both of you.

I hope this publication leads to further appreciation of the phenomenal, unique and important talent that was Albert Ayler. He was a shooting star; he blazed through all too quickly but his light still shines.

Gordon Lobban  
Edinburgh, Scotland, November 2021