



# Albert Ayler Quintet At Slugs' Saloon 1966 Revisited

With Donald Ayler, Michel Samson, Lewis Worrell & Ronald Shannon Jackson

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**B**rick facades, two unspectacular shop windows and the simple wooden door leading to a club one might call unpretentious, if it weren't for the fact that from 1964 to 1972 jazz history was written here. The rectangular room had space for less than a hundred people, the narrow stage in front of them, and a bar at the back. Dim, plain and smoky is how one must imagine the interior of Slugs' Saloon in New York's Lower East Side.

For seven years Sun Ra played here with his Arkestra every Monday night. Jackie McLean performed on and off on Sunday afternoons. On February 19, 1972, trumpet player Lee Morgan was shot dead at the bar by his jealous wife after the set. The list of artists who had played at Slugs' up until then reads like a *Who's Who* of the energy-charged years following the October Revolution in Jazz. Paul Bley, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Kenny Dorham, Gil Evans, Hank Mobley, Pharoah Sanders, Archie Shepp, Wayne Shorter ... the trombone player Roswell Rudd remembered that every night at about 3:30 the lisping bartender Bill would repeat his mantra: "You don't have to go home but you must leave Slugs." Many artists released live recordings from the club, including Art Blakey, Charles Lloyd, Charles Mingus, Sun Ra, Charles Tolliver.

And Albert Ayler. The recordings of his concert from May 1, 1966, were not released in the US until the ESP-Disk label was revitalised in 2005. From 1982 onwards they were available as a licence in Italy, Japan and Germany. Knowing about the visionary, shamanistic character and music of Albert Ayler, the mandolin player, poet and music writer John Kruth penned the liner notes for ESP in September 2005 in the wake of hurricane Katrina that had struck New Orleans.

Kruth heard anger, solace and a sense of the present that fused ancient artefacts and future developments into the truly novel sounds of an almost ritual ceremony. He recognised something in this music that helped him understand his own here and now. He heard the Ayler brothers and their quintet as fearless seekers of truth, who were on their way to another level of peace, while celebrating anguish rather than entertainment. Their mission was to heal the world with music. Kruth describes Ayler as reserved and shy and, quoting label mate Burton Greene, "majestic and humble at the same time".

Among the jazz innovators, Albert Ayler is still considered a solitary figure to this day. From 1964 on he pursued his vision with firm determination. Like no other artist he used well-known melodies from military, marching, blues, gospel and minstrel show music as a starting point, and from these biographical earworm references he set out with the greatest expressiveness into an unconditionality that caused productive disturbance, which his music still does.

On the one hand, there are catchy themes, persistently presented in the Slugs' concert as well. On the other hand, they are taken apart by the physical force and ecstasy of the attacks that follow. Even though expressive solos emerge, Ayler's music is a truly collaborative creation. His adherence to trivial themes symbolises the painful process of separation, of being at the mercy of a country struggling with catastrophes, of being thrown into this world of modern man.

Ayler exposes himself to these coordinates between simplicity and radically destructive re-orientation, and like no other speaks of the torn nature of the individual. To describe his vibrato-laden tenor saxophone tone as powerful would be an understatement. Ayler's tone comes with the force of a well-aimed blow and at the same time speaks of the fragility of existence, it seems both childishly playful and radically emancipatory. Ayler firmly believed that a changed music also

changes people. He was convinced that it could transcend things and infuse them with a higher meaning. The Slugs' recordings can also be heard as a document of uncompromising commitment and intensity. However, "We're not screaming against the system. A man who's creating doesn't have time to hate."

This music conveys a feeling. At Slugs', Ayler spread out his well-known tunes "Truth Is Marching In", "Our Prayer" (Don Ayler), "Bells" and "Ghosts" as never before in a continuous medley, adding new elements and laying trails to "The Star-Spangled Banner", "Auld Lang Syne", Gillespie's "Salt Peanuts" or Monk's "Thelonious". It's not only the energetic presence of drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson that makes these recordings to something special, it's also the fragile metallic sound of the Dutch-born Michel Samson's violin. It is more than just an unexpected timbre that he inscribes in the collective improvisations; it is an expansion of

Beauty] is a stream-of-consciousness account of the Ayler concert at Slugs' on May 1, 1966, and how it affected the writer. Delius was 23 and actually in the audience. The very young man had come to New York with a delegation from Group 47. On the last evening he had enough of the established cultural scene, left the troop and with two friends ended up in the club. During the concert that first distressed him – "you just have to get through this" – his "half-hearted interest" grew into a fascination, "the flame-throwing saxophone blew my mind". What was negotiated here, he understood, was "not comparable to the petty worries of young white Europeans". It stirred remembrances of a lecture by Pier Paolo Pasolini in Berlin, his visions of a "future of beauty", which Delius rediscovers in this music.

It is the time of the Vietnam War and the Kennedy assassination in the land of Wall Street, race discrimination and the

this cosmos of sound that comes from somewhere else and magnifies the uniqueness of this music.

It is well known and to this day the material of legends how the lives of the brothers Don and Albert Ayler ended in the psychiatric hospital and in the East River, respectively. Perhaps they were too sensitive. That's another reason why in his liner notes John Kruth quoted Allen Ginsberg, the most influential beatnik poet, with the opening line of his poem *Howl*: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness".

Another controversial author, the German Büchner Prize winner Friedrich Christian Delius (1943–2022), devoted himself to the subject matter quite directly. Published in 2018, *Die Zukunft der Schönheit* [The Future of

electric chair. "I was grateful to Ayler and his men, they had naturalised me in the United States of poetry and bombs, of freedom and fatal shots." To the young author his own texts seem insignificant compared to the force of this music, and he is aware that "the future can only begin after tearing down the old".

Delius describes the club, the audience, the music and the musicians with great suggestive power. From a distance of fifty years he recalls an experience of initiation: "This music took music apart and put it together anew." It becomes Delius' narrative principle to "build phantasies on tones". And, indeed, the title of the last piece of the evening is "Initiation".

Ulrich Steinmetzger

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*Ulrich Steinmetzger*

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Albert Ayler    tenor saxophone  
Donald Ayler    trumpet  
Michel Samson    violin  
Lewis Worrell    double bass  
Ronald Shannon Jackson    drums

- |   |                                      |       |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | <b>Truth Is Marching In</b>          | 10:07 |
| 2 | <b>Our Prayer</b><br>by Donald Ayler | 12:09 |
| 3 | <b>Bells</b>                         | 18:00 |
| 4 | <b>Ghost</b>                         | 24:04 |
| 5 | <b>Initiation</b>                    | 16:32 |

Total Time AAD <sup>24</sup>Bit 79:55

ISRC coded CD

Compositions by Albert Ayler, except otherwise indicated.

Recorded May 1, 1966 by Jan Werner; CD-master by Michael Brändli, Hardstudios AG; Cover photo by Bill Smith; Liner notes by Ulrich Steinmetzger; graphic concept by fuhrer vienna; Associate Producer: Christian C. Dalucas; Executive producer: Werner X. Uehlinger.

Honoring producer: Bernhard „Benne“ Vischer

Generous contributions by Christian C. Dalucas, George G. Schmid and Mario DaRugna made the production of this Revisited release possible.

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Jazz/Free Improvisation

# #帽子

John Coltrane Quartet  
Newport, New York,  
Alabama 1963  
ezz-thetics 1114

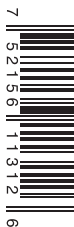
Archie Shepp  
Blasé And Yasmina  
ezz-thetics 1115

Albert Ayler Quintet 1966  
Berlin, Lörrach,  
Paris & Stockholm  
ezz-thetics 2-1117

Albert Ayler New York Eye  
And Ear Control  
ezz-thetics 1118

Jimmy Giuffre  
Free Fall Clarinet 1962  
ezz-thetics 1119

John Coltrane  
Chasin' The Trane  
Village Vanguard  
Masters + 1  
ezz-thetics 1120



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