

THE NEW MUSIC THAT'S RISING FROM THE EAST

Jazz has reached a crossroads – the old sounds have reached ultimate refinement, the new sounds are too remote and rarefied for general adoption. Viewing the scene, HUGH BLACKWELL suggests a solution in the East.

"I never learned anything at school because I didn't believe what the teachers were telling me. And anyway, I could see that even they were bored to death by it all." And so Archie Shepp, leader and most articulate of the New Musicians, taught himself to play the alto saxophone instead, because he liked the phrases Charlie Parker played.

Shepp's sound, like his words, and like the sounds of the other new musicians is uncompromisingly divergent and reactionary. If music must be bound under the laws of harmony, have melody and rhythm, and be beauty-orientated, then the new sound is certainly not music.

Outrage, frustration, speed, precision, disunity, egotism, despair and insanity; jazz has always been a reflection of its time, and these are the primary moods reflected by the jazzmen of today. The new music ranges from electronic sonic zoom noises, booms, gongs, bells and harps, to the free jazz of Albert Ayler, the psychedelic anti-music of Sun Ra and his Solar Arkestra, and the advanced folk songs of the Fugs, most of whom are recorded on ESP records, an American recording company.

The Fugs are hysterical and noisy and they have no special connection with the Fug for Peace campaign currently popular among those who listen to their music. Sun Ra and his Solar Arkestra are 10 bald Negroes who dress in luminous ceremonial robes for personal appearances, sit in a circle in total darkness except for the glow off their clothes. Sun Ra chants and plays the spiral gong, celeste and sun harp. Other instruments in his orchestra include thunder drums, bells, bass whistle, clarinet, triangle, piano and water pipe, apart from the usual instruments of a regular orchestra.

Albert Ayler, a tenor saxophonist, is the best known of the New Thing noisemakers. *Melody Maker* has been busy controverting about him for months. Musically he is way out on a limb, neither protesting, dissenting, prophesying

nor even really contributing creatively.

Explosions by Bob James is the most experimental of the recent ESP releases, combining electronic sounds and jazz. Once music goes electronic it is in another sphere altogether, the possibilities are infinite and the result is often chaotic. In this case the rhythm generated by the Bob James Trio just holds the LP together, while above the rather standard jazz-science-fiction-outer-space-type cosmic shrieks, drones, thuds, echoes, creaks, static, drag-race sounds and distorted voices over intercoms happen at random.

Ran Blake Plays Solo Piano, another ESP release, is a better example of new music. Controlled, precise, emotive, Ran Blake relies on the purity of silence and the single note to hold attention. This requires precise timing and resolve but he demonstrates effectively on *Stratosphunk* by playing boogie at the top of the scale that he can swing when he

wants to. It's a shame he does not swing more often; but he plays good blues.

These ESP releases indicate the various different directions that jazz could now take. Monk, Mingus and Coltrane, the giants of the last generation, have gone as far as they can go; all they can do from now on is to refine the sound they are already making.

A crossroads has been reached and many young musicians are ready, having absorbed what their last group of heroes had to say, to go in a new direction. They can't go electronic because they do not physically have a sound library and the necessary tape decks. They cannot go solo because they don't like being lonely. They cannot follow Albert Ayler's mournful trail because he does not swing, and jazz just must swing to communicate. They cannot go cosmic because they don't want to be prophets of the future but musicians of the present. Shepp will show the

West the way, but there is now the East to reckon with. Until recently jazz has been monopolised almost entirely by America. Jazz in its modern form was born there and has stayed there and despite its original African origins no great jazzman has emerged from any other country except America. Now, however, musicians even in America have started to turn towards the East for inspiration and new ideas. Ravi Shankar, an Indian musical prodigy, has suddenly found that his popularity is not just confined to his home country.

Ravi Shankar is the recognised master drummer of India, but of choice he plays the sitar, a large stringed instrument, resembling a guitar in shape but not in sound. To date Ravi Shankar and his band have made seven tours of America and have been well received by the public and the press; he has yet to come to Britain.



Ultimately the new sound makes itself felt in popular forms, as exploited, for example, by groups of musicians. This is The Move, the best of Birmingham's local groups which made the blasé crowd in London's

Marquee Club actually dance. The Move has absorbed the influences of R & B and the pounding jazz of Charlie Mingus. They also play Indian-based music which contrasts nicely with their Chicago suits.