

Reference: Albert Ayler Spirits & Spirits Rejoice



Sound restoration & Mastering
by Michael Brändli

“Only by the form, the pattern, / Can words or music reach / The stillness, as a Chinese jar still / Moves perpetually in its stillness.” In this excerpt from “Burnt Norton” (the first of T.S. Eliot’s “Four Quartets,” written in 1936), the poet confronts the oppositional forces of past and present, serenity and intensity, creative intent and spiritual transformation. The example of the antique Chinese jar, an artistic object from the past that maintains over time its formal and spiritual distinctiveness through the nature of its design and character, is used to confirm the essence of poetry and music – creativity without physical properties – as sharing the same ability to transform (that is, transfer form as) thought to energy to lasting experience.

One of Eliot’s mentors, Ezra Pound, had two decades earlier identified a brief, radical British artistic theory, known as vorticism (from vortex, which Pound saw as “a radiant node or cluster through which ideas are constantly rushing”), that emphasized, in poetry, music, sculpture, or painting, the necessity of energy emerging from the friction of angles and interacting lines, an organization of fluid clusters of activity, the simultaneity of multiple directions, and from Pound’s “Manifesto,” the freedom of “chaos invading concept” and “the feeling of masses in relation... [with] the defining of these masses by planes.” Pound’s foremost examples were the painter Wyndham Lewis and the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, whose art reflected the inner tension of shape and color as primary agents of form without the romanticized expression of the imagination, isolating a manner of purity of complex design and clarity of invention that may also be discerned in a 17th century Johann Froberger *ricercare* or a 20th century Gertrude Stein text. Or perhaps in these performances by Albert Ayler.

In the archives of the Albert Ayler website (Ayler.co.uk.), a February 1963 article from his hometown *Cleveland Call & Post* (published a month after recording *My Name is Albert Ayler* in Copenhagen) quotes him as explaining, “Free music is a new blues, the new truth as seen by musicians who want to take a modernistic view...geometric shapes and forms conveyed visually.” This is not to suggest that Ayler had any connection to Pound or the vorticist artists, but to trace a thread of

creative, and unorthodox, inspiration through time periods, various stylistic resources, and otherwise unrelated artists.

Although originally released on the Debut label based in Copenhagen, *Spirits* was his initial opportunity to record his “free music,” February 1964 in New York, with for the first time his own choice of musicians, drawn from his experience with Cecil Taylor (drummer Sunny Murray), one of his early influences, Sonny Rollins’ band (bassist Henry Grimes), and his Cleveland past (trumpeter Norman Howard and bassist Earle Henderson), as well as the first to focus on his own compositions (plus Howard’s “Witches and Devils”). Though conceptually distinct, descriptions from vorticism apply: energy emerging from interactive horn and percussive lines; the simultaneity of harmonic directions via the two basses, bowed and plucked; the dramatic sense of “chaos invading concept.” Moreover, the ensemble has a sculptural quality, with contrapuntal lines layered in related tonal “planes” that merge and separate – the sharp edge of Howard’s trumpet and the dense texture of Ayler’s tenor seem carved out of hard surfaces.

The seventeen months between *Spirits* and *Spirits Rejoice* were filled with activity that affected profound change in Ayler’s music and life. He reduced his quintet to a trio and made the live recordings for ESP that shook the jazz establishment, enlarged the ensemble for the *New York Eye and Ear Control* and *Bells* sessions that would introduce a shift in group dynamics, worked for a time in New

York with an unrecorded band including pianist Paul Bley (whose then-wife, Annette Peacock, composed “Albert’s Love Theme,” which remained in Bley’s repertoire thereafter), returned to Scandinavia with a quartet that included Don Cherry, and back in the States replaced Cherry with his brother Donald on trumpet.

Energy is equivalent to intensity; intensity is not dependent upon speed or volume for its effect. *Spirits Rejoice* evokes more fluid intensity than sculpted detail. The fusillade of fanfares (resolving into “La Marseillaise”) and horn raptures, churning basses, and insistent drums that energize the title track would plot a new course for Ayler’s ensembles in the coming year, but the remainder of the album offers several different perspectives. “Holy Family” sports an upbeat, cheerful theme, in severe contrast to the rip-snorting, obsessive “Prophet.” “D.C.” acknowledges that its significant motif mirrors a theme that Don Cherry previously recorded with Ayler under the title “Infant Happiness,” then revisited in later pieces “Elephantasy” and “Awake Nu.” And the raucously sentimental, ‘30s Tin Pan Alley-ish melody of “Angels” is lushly ornamented with harp-sichord flourishes – possibly Ayler’s conception of angelic harps?

Just as the song titles confirm Ayler’s state of mind was contemplating spiritual issues, the music confirms his faith in the symmetry of chaos and coherence, and the forms of energy.

Art Lange, Chicago, October 2025

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"Free music is a new blues, the new truth as seen by musicians who want to take a modernistic view...geometric shapes and forms conveyed musically."

Albert Ayler

Albert Ayler Quartet 1964 Spirits To Ghosts

Albert Ayler **tenor saxophone**
Norman Howard **trumpet**
Henry Grimes **double bass,**
tracks 1, 2 + 4
Earle Henderson **double bass,**
tracks 3 + 4
Sunny Murray **drums**

Recorded February 24, 1964 in
New York.

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|---|---|-------|
| 1 | Spirits | 6:34 |
| 2 | Witches And Devils
by Norman Howard | 12:08 |
| 3 | Holy, Holy | 11:11 |
| 4 | Saints | 6:17 |

Albert Ayler 1965 Spirits Rejoice

Albert Ayler **tenor saxophone**
Donald Ayler **trumpet**
Charles Tyler **alto saxophone**
Call Cobbs **harpsichord, track 8**
Henry Grimes **double bass**
Gary Peacock **double bass**
Sunny Murray **drums**

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|-------|
| 5 | Spirits Rejoice | 11:38 |
| 6 | Holy Family | 2:09 |
| 7 | D.C. | 7:59 |
| 8 | Angels | 5:29 |
| 9 | Prophet | 5:36 |

Recorded September 23, 1965 at
Judson Hall, New York

Total Time ADD 69:04

All compositions by Albert Ayler, except
otherwise indicated.
ISRC coded CD

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