

BLACK MUSIC

Essays by
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Apple Cores #5— The Burton Greene Affair

The quality of being is what soul is, or what a soul is. What is the quality of your being? Quality here meaning, what does it possess? What a being doesn't possess, by default, also determines the quality of the being—what its soul actually is.

And let us think of soul as *anima*, spirit (*spiritus*, breath), as that which carries breath or the living wind. We are animate because we breathe. And the spirit which breathes in us, which animates us, which drives us, makes the paths by which we go along our way and is the final characterization of our lives. Essence/Spirit. The final sum of what we call being, and the most elemental. There is no life without spirit. The human being cannot exist without a soul, unless the thing be from evil-smelling freezing caves breathing high-valence poison gases now internalized into the argon-blue eyes.

What your spirit is is what you are, what you breathe upon your fellows. Your internal and elemental volition.

At the Jazz Art Music Society in Newark, one night, pianist Burton Greene performed in a group made up of Marion Brown, alto saxophone, and Pharoah Sanders, tenor saxophone.

Greene's performance, strange as it was, was not really unique. Its meanings were the way the world always speaks. "Existence proves itself."

I want here to list some observations I made of the exis-

tence of soul and anti-soul or the spiritual and the anti-spiritual . . . how they do exist.

The Burton Greene Affair, I have called it because Burton Greene is a white, super-hip (MODERN) pianist whose work is and will be praised and soon raised when Morgenstern and Company become his Joshuas and the walls of the banks fall down.

The music this night was rising and grew heavy, beating the walls of that place. A trembling music . . . especially that Pharoah Sanders makes with his long harmonics-driven line (Nazakat Ali and Salamat Ali from Pakistan can do this with their voices). Marion Brown was rising with Pharoah. It was a mad body-dissolving music . . . rose and stayed there . . . ecstasy of understanding then, evolution. The feeling such men make is of the consciousness of evolution, the will of the universe.

Yes, it is music which, under the best fingers, is a consciously-Spiritual Music. That is, we mean to speak of Life Force and try to become one of the creative functions of the universe.

So Sun-Ra, who knows something of the Wisdom Religion itself, uses this knowledge to make his music bridge to higher human principles. Sun-Ra speaks of the actual change, the actual evolution through space, not only in space ships, but of the higher principles of humanity, the progress after the death of the body.

Pharoah Sanders is a spiritual person. He also wants to feel the East, as an Oriental man. Marion Brown wants to understand what spiritual is, and he follows and associates with certain spiritual energies. That is, he understands it is, to a certain extent, about energy.

To be spiritual is to be in touch with the living magnetism of life-world-universe. "All you folks got rhythm!" Right! (And it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, etc., etc.) Rich to mean *perverted by things*, which is America, the occident. Where the sun dies.

In the beautiful writhe of the black spirit-energy sound, the whole cellar was possessed and animated. Things flew through the air.

Burton Greene, at one point, began to bang aimlessly at the keyboard. He was writhing, too, pushed by forces he could not use or properly assimilate. He kept running his fingers compulsively through his hair.

Finally he stood above the piano . . . the music around him flying . . . and began to strike the piano strings with his fingers and knock on the wood of the instrument. He got a drumstick to make it louder. (Greene's "style" is pointed, I would presume, in the direction of Cecil Taylor, and, I would also suppose, with Taylor the Euro-American Tudor-Cage, Stockhausen-Wolf-Cowell-Feldman interpretations.)

But the sound he made would not do, was not where the other sound was. He beat the piano, began to slam it open and shut, slapping the front and side and top of the box. The sound would not do, would not be what the other sound was.

He sat again and doodled, he slumped his head. He ran his fingers desultorily across the keys. Pharoah and Marion still surged; they still went on screaming us into spirit.

Burton Greene got up again. A sudden burst like at an offending organism, he struck out again at the piano . . . he beat and slammed and pummeled it. (The wood.) He hit it with his fist.

Finally he sprawled on the floor, under the piano, shadow knocking on the piano bottom, on his elbows he tapped, tapped furiously then subsided to a soft flap, bap bap, then to silence, he slumped to quiet his head under his arm and the shadow of the piano.

Pharoah and Marion were still blowing. The beautiful sound went on and on.