

VICENZA FILM PROJECT - INTRODUCTION

THE SUN RA MYTHIC DREAM ARKESTRA

under the direction of MARSHALL ALLEN

LIVE AT THE TEATRO OLIMPICO

Peter Dennett, Art Yard, London

Sun Ra who navigated to Earth from Saturn on an astrologically significant date, proclaimed the African origin of jazz, reaffirmed pride in black history and reasserted the spiritual and mystical dimensions of music - all important factors in the black cultural / political renaissance of the 60's. Sun Ra was without doubt one of the great pioneers of modern music, whose influence, seeped through into every nook and cranny from Karlheinz Stockhausen to Sonic Youth from Brian Eno to Aphex Twin.

Musically, Ra's compositional and ensemble techniques made him truly prophetic, from 1955 when he began recording his Arkestra, one heard not only complete irregular structures and modal improvisation but extensive use of miscellaneous percussion, odd meters and polyrhythms plus electronic keyboards. By the end of the 50's his band were into the whole era of 'noise elements' and collective sonic exploration, blues, be-bop 60's free-form, space-age electronic solos - the Arkestra's repertoire is no less than the complete history of black creative music. Marshall Allen, director of the Arkestra continues to lead the band exploring Ra's compositions from big band jazz to Disney themes and space-age jazz-funk incorporating political raps and chants of cosmic awareness. This film will enable Marshall Allen to tell his and Ra's story and profile of the pioneers in contemporary music.

The interviews with the musicians will focus on the Arkestra's mythology that is part of a black historical continuum that reached back through the blues and slavery to an Egyptian civilisation that began five thousand years ago. The aim is to explore the contention with the two components of ancient Egypt and outer space. Ancient Egypt and outer space are the core factors in the Arkestra's mythology and are grounded in a particular cultural context and aspects of African-American history. The Arkestra's references to ancient Egypt were an attempt to rekindle awareness of black peoples achievements and black history. The 'discrediting' of black culture was a concern of European thinkers 'racism' as means to keep black African's as far as possible from European civilisation and has remained a major part of American mainstream culture. The Arkestra's invocations of ancient Egypt were intended to counter this negative view of black history.

This film will be visually imaginative. There is a great deal of existing archive footage of the Sun Ra Arkestra including that shot Cairo Egypt.