

## **VICENZA FILM PROJECT - HISTORY**

# **THE SUN RA MYTHIC DREAM ARKESTRA**

**under the direction of MARSHALL ALLEN**

**LIVE AT THE TEATRO OLIMPICO**

Peter Dennett, Art Yard, London

Musically, Sun Ra was the most eccentric and imaginative leader to front a band, who explored the new forms of musical expression. Sun Ra kept the Arkestra in existence for over three decades, which is largely undocumented and was the most adventurous and genuinely progressive of bands ever.

There is an extraordinary story about a ground-breaking 'visionary' in a musical revolution. Sun Ra navigated to Earth from Saturn on an astrologically significant date. Biographers believe Sun Ra was born Herman Blount in Birmingham, Alabama on May 22nd 1914. He 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.

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 was no less than the complete history of black creative music.

This film will focus on his early life and influences and work as a pianist and composer in Chicago of the mid-'30's. Although this part of his life is largely undocumented, he grew up a fan of the swing bands and by 1946 was writing arrangements for his idol Fletcher Henderson. He assembled the Arkestra in the mid-'50's featuring musicians such as Pat Patrick and John Gilmore. Through Alton Abraham's Saturn Research recording label Sun Ra produced over two hundred records, expanding his repertoire from doo-wop and big band jazz to Disney themes and space age jazz funk incorporating political raps and chants of cosmic awareness.

This film will chart his early life through the eyes of Marshall Allen, the oldest surviving member of Sun Ra's Mythic Science Arkestra. Marshall Allen, director of the Arkestra Music People continues to lead the band exploring Ra's compositions. This film will enable Marshall Allen to tell his and Ra's story and profile the pioneers in contemporary music.

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We 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.

The film will include Sun Ra's political activism in the '50's heading a nationalist group that urged blacks to take advantage of the advances in science and technology through to his work in the '60's as a founder member of the Jazz Composers Guild set up to encourage musicians to wrest back control of their music from the reactionary establishment of club owners, promoters and record company executives.

We will draw on archive footage, much of which is accessible through the Alton Abraham Collection of Sun Ra at the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago. Alton Abraham has been integrally involved with the evolution of Sun Ra. We will include interviews with members of the Arkestra such as Marshall Allen and others who have worked with Sun Ra and existing footage of the Arkestra in concert.

Blues, bebop, '60's freeform, space age electronic solos - the Arkestra's repertoire is no less than the complete history of black creative music performed with a passion and a gusto that explode it out of the past in a blaze of living colour. We hope this film will bring the phenomena of Sun Ra, visionary musician and poet, to the wider audience he deserves.