

*We had nowhere to go*, musically as well, on this darn hot lovely summer of 2006. Basking in the sun like useless lizards, mildly dizzy, in the garden of French poet **Bruno Grégoire**, Romainville, outer suburbs of Paris. We had tried to nail our next masterpiece – all kinds of muthas hammering on all kinds of instruments that we thought would be the ideal background to Bruny's words. Didn't work. No clarity. No purity. I wiped out the tapes. On June 4 we decided to call **Benjamin Duboc** for help and to do it old-style – two sessions, live, Sonny's horns and Bruno's voice, with no small help from **Anne Segal**, who managed to keep the pirate boat afloat while we were workshopping our Grand Ideas. Well, all that was in the near future of that long summer – Benjamin was on tour, we had two months on our hands.

Sonny was intent on not treading on the old jazz path too soon – as he was coming off three excruciating years of high heights with Norwegian producer **Jon Klette**, a guardian angel who, simply put, had set himself upon the humble task of producing Sonny's "ultimate jazz albums", the mighty trilogy **The Traveler / I'll See You When You Get There / Last Man Standing**. (Lurking in the shadows was the outlandish visionary arranger **Vidar Johansen** who was slowly making his way towards the zappa-esque, sprawling two-hours orchestral piece **Atomic Symphony**, premiered in Oslo in August of '07, an event that brought Sonny's Norwegian period to an end with a loud smash as the album nearly got the local Grammy.) But in the Summer of 2006, all he (rightly) wanted to do was "play the cor anglais". And as the poetry album would be only cor anglais and voice, there were all kind of in-betweens to explore.

Guests were coming to and fro at Bruno and Anne's. We had to clear the way at some point. So we found ourselves on mattresses in an empty house for sale next door. Listening to the jazz trilogy all day. On the night of June 5, Sonny practised White Magic in the silent deserted main room. No joke. We brought back the Backwoods of Louisiana in Modern Times. On the morning of June 6 Sonny commanded that I haul the heavy tape recorder – Revox A-77, mind you – to the joint, and ushered three takes of **What Do We Know?**, thus titled because "We know shit, Man". Do you want the truth, or do you need the truth? We snuck back into Bruno's house, Sonny firmly sat me, a youngster utterly devoid of musical wealth, at the piano, and had me overdub a rigorous three note motif to propel the fated English horn track into the realm of post-**Terry Riley** meditation. We were tripping. We were on a mission. It took us over seven years to complete it.

In and out of life's convoluted cycles of angst, journeys, skirmishes, minor and major drawbacks, each time we reconvened at Bruno and Anne's, we added layers and layers of stuff to what we never referred to as a project. Strictly an ongoing experiment. We had a few things in mind, though. First thing, **Tales Of The Ancient East**, an uncelebrated CD-R published ca. 2002 by **Brandon Evans**. A righteous jam, it dealt at length with Sonny's life-long obsession for India and Master **Ustad Bismillah Khan** (cue, **Seven Dances Of Salome** on **Manhattan Egos**). Horns, harmonium, chant. Yet – it retained too much of the free jazz ghost. Second thing, **The Future Is Ancient**, an uncelebrated CD-R published ca. 2004 by **Jeffrey Hayden Shurdut**. An exercise in overdub, therefore a real "album" (as opposed to yer average live rumble promoted without insight to the dubious dignity of the artist's "new record"), it dealt at length with Sonny's unsatisfied life-long obsession with electricity (did we tell you he had a house in Woodstock and **Hendrix** had his rehearsal studio next to his? Guess what happened. Ah, 1968...) and production (a life in jazz: Boy, if it ain't a one-take [or less] business, then it ain't good).

*Technically speaking, we decided that amplification and recording situations would have their say, at last. (Producer's confession: all the way down to the finished album I more or less followed a text-book. **John Technical With Strings**, the unheralded rusty and deviant electronica paean by the late Danish alto and Treader masterminds John Coxon and Ashley Wales.) And, roughly round 2010 when Improvising Beings finally reared its pointed nasty head, Sonny, looking upon my bent shoulder, started to take a keen interest in computer engineering. Boy did he have fun when he found out that the editing process, nowhere near in sight for the first four decades of his career (because the budget for editing session was nowhere near in sight), was now a matter of nanoseconds calculations. Cue, **Symphony Of The Peacocks** (2010), and **Beyond The Planets** (2012), and this here behemoth of a box set. **Great Black Music** rightfully celebrated the advent of Composition in Jazz (a musical tool denied to the jazz musician out of sheer racism). **Great Sonny Simmons Music** in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century declares that boundaries are dead, the sanctity of the linear performance is dead, God gave unlimited imagination to Man, that He created after His own Fancy, and so reconstruction, Re-Composition must now pave new ways for Jazz and its offspring. Dig?*

*Musically speaking, - now we could go anywhere. And certainly we did. With the above-mentioned pieces of early and late Simmons recorded history as a blueprint, we resolutely sketched a map of our **Eatherlands**, as **Bruno Grégoire** christened them - ideal (but not utopian) places where we located our Roots. Actual roots, or roots as we shaped them, while our musical pirogues sailed dark, languid, never-ending waters. A vast, drone-like raga, the first chapter of this Story, **Leaving Knowledge, Wisdom And Brilliance**, is a mental trip informed by India, Africa, ambient, prog and psychedelia; meditation and mundane intoxication; the fireplace at Bruno's burning bright as I think our hearts did. No less. I won't attempt to describe it. Its inner rules are sufficiently clear upon listening. If it wears you off, if you lose track of time and self in the process, if you deem it as complete madness, then we have succeeded. Sonny insists that We, We All, are fallen natures. Our redemption lies in the averting of our psyches from the matters of everyday life; our art's redemption, hence, lies in the averting of our bodies from the matters of everyday music, the ways we were taught to think music, to play music. We, not so humbly, present you with music that strays far away from what you know, far away from what we know, too.*

*The experience of being a musician in the hands of **Sonny Simmons** reminds me of an interview with **Randy Weston**. The great shaman expanded upon the art of the griot - the black man creating music with anything at hand. He's a leader of minds, not of men. He resurrects instincts you didn't know were there in the first place - you don't have to worry about the inadequacies of being human anymore. You're not under savant scrutiny: although these were glorious times, Sonny always ponders that in the world of kick-ass be-bop jam sessions that form his musical upbringing, skill was a mean to a terrible end, that is, "out-staging" the other guys on the bandstand, a deadly deed that destroyed many a soul. Skill is power. Power is not necessarily strength. The griot exercises strength, not power. Break the mould. Don't learn "chops". That's how Sonny Simmons supervised our musical development over the magical years of recording the box set.*

*(Footnote: Please check **The Cosmosomatic's** latest album, **Jazz Maalika**, a necessary companion to our project. **Michael Marcus's** brilliant arrangements are a fantastic update of **Joe Harriott's** indo jazz fusions.)*

In May and June 2003 we were looking forward with anticipation to Sonny's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. A mere coincidence? The time had arrived to plot his 80<sup>th</sup> appearance on record. – Time. Time to conjure up old ghosts and old tapes to bring the journey to an end. Time to kneel, and give, O receiver of the gift. We locked ourselves up in my attic to brutally unleash, electrically and electronically, giant slabs of Post-Blues. *Chasing The Bird?* The bird/Bird has flown, has crashed, and for more than half a century the worms have fed on whatever remained of its decayed, holy flesh, feathers, music. But now the bones are bare. Setting: a bed of Autumn Leaves of course, Sonny's voice comes through, *In The Autumn Of My Years*. Frankie's old hit has become a credo. Bare bones. Not a mere skelington: really, the Structure of Things that Went, now that the Shapes of Things to Come is way behind us all.

**"Right on man, let's hit it."** Under the surveillance of the bogeyman muezzin, Madness takes form, the road is spiral shape, shapes and drapes, tones and drones. CONFUSIONS. "Come on man, let's get up and run." Really – although I'm quite sure I was dealing with the organ and synths on this session (*Old Lonesome Roads*), I hope for my own saviour that my soul managed to escape the room before track 3. All things considered, let's take it as an alibi to present you with Sonny's trademark scorched-earth-round-the-crossroads saxophone. Don't say we are Anti-Jazz. We are groovy in our own way.

**Now** for the real treats of this second box. Our **"25<sup>th</sup> Century Prophet"** has something in store for the somewhat blasé inhabitant of the 21<sup>st</sup>. His reputation as an impulsive provocateur, and adept experimenter, is well-established. But what was once shocking "back in the day" (*The Guy Staying On The Watch Burning Spirits*, name it...), is now classicism. Ostentatiously, he has jumped from an end to another for now sixty years (he turned professional in 1954), either bending his native idiom to its extremes, or should we rather say, taking Coltrane into account, its logical conclusions, establishing the *Free Within The Law* Policy (you have to state the rules to stretch them to their outer limits); either throwing it all away, embracing new styles and forms to recreate them after his own fashion. The former aspect has been well publicized. The later has remained a side aspect to his discography. Other than the above-mentioned CD-Rs in the 2000s, worth mentioning are his contribution to Acid-Jazz, *Tachyon* (1993); his "solo album for samplers" exploring eleven styles of popular music, *Saxophone Legacy* (1997), which has adorned over the years numerous electronic works; and his flirtations with hip-hop, electro-acoustic or heavy metal, though they remain unreleased as of now (though his psychedelic duet with electric guitar maverick **Thomas Bellier** on *Beyond The Planets*, 2012's companion to the box sets, gives you a taste of what's coming at you, guys).

**Forgive the rough edges - we are entering noise and ambient territory.** That requires the right accomplices. The impending doom of any such collaborations is a clash, rather than a meeting, between Ancient and Modern; in the process, cliché anti-jazz would be the easy way, not to mention the revamping of old ideas with studio equipment pre-sets (cue, gross pseudo-dance beats?). Thus, *The Breathe Of Life* is strictly a dialogue between the old and the new, the acetate versus the computer age, saxophone blues lines fighting and arguing against a backdrop of chaos. The whole is intentionally rather dark, although we collectively couldn't resist to have an established form of music, in all irony and sincerity, supersede in the end. [As on *Old Lonesome Roads*. Sonny used Michel Kristof and myself as his backing band. My old buddy **Michel "MKF"**

**Kristof** plays a wide array of electrified instruments – some meant to be electrified (guitars), some not (sitar, esraj, guembri). He went to India many times. His physical vehicle returned, part of his inner self didn't (Asia always wins). His heroes, other than Sonny, are Jimmy Hendrix and **Lou Reed** (the guitar player). He provides the backbone to everything in there. I'm a mere colourist of his endeavours. Together, we are **Other Matter**, 'nuff said, we're still trying to pretend we're not playing on this album: teetering on the edge of sanity is the not-so-light notion that Sonny Simmons once played with **John Coltrane's** rhythm section, or **Eric Dolphy**. In comparison to these luminaries, we equal our musical abilities to thrice the cosmic void, our choice subject on our own records.]

Something else emerges from the collision with Anton Mobin and AKA\_Bondage on *Instrumental*

*Martial Arts Of Tomorrow* (an uncanny tribute to Sonny's movie heroes, **Bruce Lee** and **Jean-Claude Van Damme**). Both

French musicians eschew categorization with a graceful twist of your nerves. Mobin and his prepared chambers (mikes and sundry objects all connected) is a walking piece of musique concrete. He's been heard with, around, below, above, in the same room or not, Alexei Borisov, the London Improvisers Orchestra, Ravi Shardja, Jello Biafra. AKA\_Bondage, presently channelling a guitar into a laptop (that doesn't begin to describe the ensuing mayhem) has crossed paths with Alan Curtis and Damo Suzuki. Last time we met was to master his forthcoming abstract hip-hop album. Both belong to the generation that duly brought to the general attention lo-fi, improvisational noise rock, post-everything experimentations. Remarks Sonny, "spiritual soldiers to the global uniqueness of their art", a mission himself and the free jazz revolutionaries sustained upward the 1970s. Let me advertise here their radio show *Epsilonia*, <http://epsilonia-radio.blogspot.fr/>, and urge you to check the sum of their un-pedigreed

adventures on your search engine of choice (it's the internet age, right?). I will now avoid the dire pitfall of analysing this 25-odd minutes of sonic ippon. We sincerely hope it knocks you out – physically, I mean. Play loud. (Note: the packaging of the boxes is a tribute to our partners in crime. We leave you to decide if the cardboard box is part of the album. Don't idolize things, worship music. Or do it the other way round, it works, too.)

**Nobodisoundz** is the dark ambient project of visual artist **Philippe Neau**, who provided the broad design for the box. *1 Put*

*It In A Dark Area Where I Can Remember No More* is exactly that: there is no denying a few shadowy overtones to the music of Sonny "More Serious Than Bone Cancer" Simmons. On The Dark Corner... The ominous quality of his saxophone playing, clustered with the voices of all the **Prophets** who are gone, John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Charles Mingus..., is mightily cathartic. Now, imagine the mental stage where the rite of purification will take place. An unfathomable distance to eternity, filled with oceans of sounds before they take form. Mute alterations of Sonny's and Michel discourse. The darkness before Genesis. Direly fighting the demons before they reach our world. Such is the mental practice Sonny taught us: your art is a quest for purity. Therefore, look Evil and Illusion in the face.

**One final word** about the last disc on this album. I can't comment much on it, as Sonny chose to put my sole synthesizers to contribution in the spare time left by our consuming mixing sessions. *Worlds Of Worlds Of Worlds Of* boldly addresses a theme that is central to his philosophy – and religion: Infinity. "We have to practice perfection." Infinity is a humbling theme indeed. Daily practice, while the spring of 2013 turned to summer, included the development of Sonny's composition, or "formula".

*Dead Years Ago/ Million Years Ahead*. As much of his recorded output on Improvising Beings stems out of sheer improvisation, I was anxious to bring this collection to an end with a prime example of his writing. Although its sonic garments are definitely rooted in minimalism and its texture purposefully synthetic (owing a lot to the keyboard used: it once belonged to **François Tusques**, who suggested I should "prepare" it in the **Cage** tradition, computers allowing the performer to digitally alter the timbre of chosen notes in real time like objects atop strings or hammers), the solid waltz motif that is repeated nearly a hundred times over the course of this sprawling, excruciating mantra will not be unfamiliar to listeners of Sonny's 1960s "tunes". Nor will be the symbolic weight of its three-fold structure. With this dry vision of life cycles spiralling into the (n)ether, our journey is cut short. Regeneration is the next chapter of Sonny Simmons super-human vision. This is a symphony in modern times. A unique window opened upon the inner work of one of the last geniuses, and I was there. I told you the story – now the message is yours to spread.

Respectfully yours,

**Julien Palomo**

May 7, 2014

Without whom... **Bruno Grégoire**, **Michel Kristof**, **Anton Mobin**, **AKA\_Bondage**, **Philippe Neau**. Of course. / **Janet Janke**, **Anne Segal**, **Aurélié Gerlach**. / **Marc Chaloin**, **Roy Morris**, the other musketeers. / **Guillaume Belhomme**, **Pierre Lemarchand**, **Grego Edwards**, **Yoshihiro Takahashi** for their support. / **Jeffrey Hayden Shurdut**, **François Tusques**, **Thomas Bellier**, **Benjamin Duboc** for their musical insights-insides. / Tampons by **Tamporelle**. / You.

