

# Robert Aaron

## TROUBLE MAN

At a time when most jazz musicians and composers graduate from music schools and academies to then follow a standard, exclusive stylistic career, it is fascinating to meet Robert Aaron, one of the last of these multi-instrumentalists to learn his trade at the 'American school', i.e. on the street and in bars.

Forced to fend for himself from the age of 14, Robert soon left his hometown of Montreal and arrived in New York in 1976 where he made a living by busking on the streets of Brooklyn. He quickly became a regular on the New York No Wave scene and was part of the original line-up of James Chance and the Contortions. He still performs with them today. He was spotted by David Bowie and recorded the 'Let's Dance' album with him. Not a bad start to his career.

Robert played his many instruments (all the saxophones and flutes, as well as piano, bass, guitar, etc.) amid the tumultuous atmosphere of 1980s' New York and recorded with rock bands such as the B52s and Blondie, funk and disco bands like Chic, and for the producer Patrick Adams.

He also played his part in the rise of hip-hop, working with Afrika Bambaataa and Heavy D as well as Stetsasonic (on the classic track 'In Full Gear' and on a historic tour of Africa), Wu-Tang Clan and RZA.

Nor did he take his foot off the gas during the Nineties, when he was responsible for one of the first house music hits, 'Sax in the Ozone', for the label Eight Ball in 1992, as well as making his musical knowledge available to Masters at Work and various other electronic artists such as Daniel Wang and Fisherspooner. He became musical director of Wyclef in 1995 for the next ten years or so.

Robert never had any career plan, his only guide being his thirst for music and the twin principles of pleasure and joy, and few people know his name and his place in the history of music. He has always preferred life in the wings and other shady areas to the 'bling bling' of the star system.

I fell in love with his music the very first time we met at Professeur Inlassable's Paris studio after the poet Gentleman Jake had put us in touch. His love of Caribbean music (he was one of the mainstays of the label Mini and has recorded dozens of albums of Haitian compas with Skah Skah and Djet X among others) and his intimate knowledge of Seventies cosmic jazz and its main acts (he also played in Lester Bowie's big band) were two good reasons for coming up with an album in the finest tradition of Heavenly Sweetness.

We didn't set any stylistic constraints, just respect for the moment and the spiritual quality of the music, quick takes, and a requirement that the tracks be emotionally honest.

We shut ourselves away for two days in the studio in Meudon with Robert's Parisian friends: the organist and godfather of Malian music Cheick Tidiane Seck and Archie Shepp's drummer Steve McCraven, the bassist Marc Berthaux and the exceptional percussion players Roger Raspail from 'gwadloup' and the Cuban master of the congos, Emilio del Monte.

Two of the label's loyal friends - the poet Anthony Joseph and the guitarist Monnette Sudler - dropped by to share some musical moments, as did the wandering saxophonist Suleyman Hakim.

The result, 'Trouble Man', is a journey in jazz as it was lived and defined in the Seventies; no borders, no conventions. Robert Aaron's music, with its range of saxophones and keyboards (piano, Hammond organ, Wurlitzer), has a unique style that is hard to find in this age of mathematical solos. It perpetuates the lyricism of Gato Barbieri (his parents are from Argentina) or Stanly Turrentine, with the intense breath of Pharaoh Sanders.

When you listen to this album, you experience the profound and now rare feeling of what drives the playing and writing of an exceptional musician. We call it 'soul', that paradoxical state when the profane and the sacred, joy and sorrow merge into one. We hear it less and less in increasingly rational musical recordings because it can only happen when there is a live connection between two hearts.

Heavenly  Sweetness

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