ED MICHEL AT IMPULSE!

BY ANDY THOMAS

"During the year 1957, I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life. At that time, in gratitude, I humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music. I feel this has been granted through His grace. ALL PRAISE TO GOD."

John Coltrane — *A Love Supreme*, original liner notes.

RECORDED for Impulse! in one intuitive session at Van Gelder Studio, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, on December 9, 1964, with his classic quartet (Jimmy Garrison, double bass, Elvin Jones, drums, McCoy Tyner, piano), *A Love Supreme* was created as John Coltrane's gift to the Divine.

For many of the musicians who followed on Impulse!, *A Love Supreme* would be the inspiration for their own spiritual pursuits in jazz. "These LPs from Impulse! were the first records I heard that sounded like the musicians were creating something bigger than what they all knew," saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings told me in 2018. "These were players who had a very specific aesthetic, and they were going into the studio in a search for an accurate portrayal of what they were going through at the time and what was happening around them."

THROUGH the sixties under the direction of producer Bob Thiele, Impulse!, in the words of Ashley Kahn in his book T*he House That Trane Built*: "wore its signature (orange and black) colors proudly and raised its exclamation point high, producing albums with hinged, brightly hued covers that opened wide, attracting generations of listeners into an exciting and far ranging world of improvised music."

As well as John Coltrane's classic quartet recordings, early releases on Impulse! included era-defining albums by such titans as Art Blakey, Oliver Nelson, Milt Jackson, McCoy Tyner, Max Roach, Charles Mingus, Freddie Hubbard, Gil Evans, and Chico Hamilton. By the mid-sixties, Impulse! was immersed in the New Thing, leading to a series of monumental avant-garde albums by Coltrane, Archie Shepp, Marion Brown, and Albert Ayler. In the wake of *A Love Supreme*, other artists at the label went deeper on their own spiritual journey.

The result was music without borders that explored sounds outside of the Western canon, presented in a way that attracted an audience well beyond the jazz fraternity. "These artists started to form connections between various music and cultures across the world," said Shabaka Hutchings. "That was what these musicians had in their consciousness at that time. It was a search for common traits across the world that unify us and to explore the roots of the music beyond the Western influence."

When Alice Coltrane replaced McCoy Tyner as pianist in her husband's group in 1966, she was immediately liberated. "Because he was a master, he saw that I was playing with only a few octaves. He told me to play the whole piano, utilise the range, so I wouldn't be locked in. It freed me," she told *Essence* magazine in 1971.

AFTER John Coltrane's death in July 1967, Alice entered a period of tapas, a Sanskrit term for austerity or suffering. "The mental and physical territories had to undergo purification and spiritualization to bring about the expansion and heightening of my consciousness level," she recalled. When she emerged from this extreme period of self-examination, she created some of the deepest spiritual jazz ever recorded.

Her first LP as a leader, *A Monastic Trio*, was released on Impulse! in 1968. It was one of the last albums on the label produced by Bob Thiele, who had steered the label through its revolutionary free jazz era. In 1968, he left Impulse! to set up his new label Flying Dutchman, taking with him Impulse! artists like Chico Hamilton and Leon Thomas, while signing Gil Scott-Heron, Lonnie Liston Smith, and Gato Barbieri. His replacement at Impulse! was a 33-year-old bass player and producer from Los Angeles by the name of Ed Michel.

HE arrived at Impulse! after working with Richard Bock at the Pacific Jazz label in LA, before being taken on as a production assistant for Orrin Keepnews at Riverside Records. He was brought into the fold of ABC [the parent company of Impulse!) for Brownie McGhee & Sonny Terry's 1969 country blues album *A Long Way From Home*. His first production credits for Impulse! ranged from the avant-garde jazz of Emil Richards and The Microtonal Blues Band's *Spirit Of 1976* to the easy listening bossa of Dave Mackay & Vicky Hamilton. But he was soon producing the legendary spiritual jazz albums that became a big part of the Impulse! story.

Recorded in the basement studio of the Coltrane home in Dix Hills, New York, on 26 January 1970, Alice Coltrane's *P'Tah The El Daoud* (named after the Egyptian god) featured Alice on harp and piano alongside the two saxophones and alto flute of Pharoah Sanders and Joe Henderson with Ron Carter on bass and Ben Riley on drums.

Released in September 1970, it was one of the most transformative of all the spiritual jazz albums recorded for Impulse! "Alice McLeod Coltrane has moved into an area of music that cannot and should not be classified simply as jazz," wrote Leonard Feather in the original liner notes. "The spiritualism and mysticism, the legacy of John Coltrane's guidance that informed her earlier works, seems to have been communicated to Sanders and Henderson."

Ed Michel recalls the session: "I flew in from LA, rented a station wagon, and picked up Ron Carter and Pharoah Sanders in Manhattan and drove to the Coltrane home. The engineer was Wally Barneke, who had worked for Decca and who, I believe, built the studio. Chuck Stewart, one of the great jazz photographers, played occasional bells."

IT would be one of the most intuitive sessions Michel ever produced: "What I remember most about the date was how little the music had to be discussed, and how quickly everything fell into place," he says. "My lasting memory is of the session-long conversations between Pharoah and Joe Henderson devoted to encyclopaedic details of technical saxophone matters."

On "Turiya & Ramakrishna" – a state of Nirvana and a 19th-century Indian mystic – and "Mantra," Alice was anticipating her trip to India later that year with Swami Satchidananda, whose spiritual teachings would culminate in her opening the Shanti Anantam Ashram (later renamed Sai Anantam Ashram) in Agoura Hills, California. The spiritual jazz masterpiece of this LP and one of her greatest compositions was the blissful "Blue Nile," with Alice's swirling harp lines combined with Ron Carter's mantra-like bass and the alto flutes of Sanders and Henderson.

Alice's hypnotic harp playing on "Blue Nile" provided the template for her best-known LP *Journey in Satchidananda*, one of spiritual jazz's most fully realised records. So how did Ed Michel handle working with such deep music? "My job was to smooth the transition from the making of music to transferring it to a fixed medium," he says. "If that was done carefully enough, I have to assume the spirituality involved in the making of the music was a part of what was transferred. And my sense as a producer was that the artist knew more about what they wanted than I did, so the more respectful of the artist's wishes and procedures I was, the better the result was likely to be."

ALONGSIDE Alice Coltrane, the one musician to fill the spiritual and creative void left by John Coltrane at Impulse! was Pharoah Sanders. "The first thing that struck me about hearing Pharoah was his way of interpreting the intensity of Coltrane and his sound," said Shabaka Hutchings. "He had that vision of what being rooted to such a powerful sound can be. And that powerful sound is something that liberates the function of being a musician from simply being a musician into being a healer in some way."

Known for his cascading sheets of sound and use of African and Eastern percussion, Sanders created great sprawling meditations in sound that reached a spiritual peak on his series of LPs for Impulse! His multi-phonic techniques, polyphonic overblowing, upper register howls, and guttural cries created a new language for the jazz saxophone. Such was his importance at the time that fellow Impulse! saxophonist Albert Ayler famously said: "Trane was the Father, Pharoah was the Son, I am the Holy Ghost."

After appearing on John Coltrane's most exploratory mid-sixties LPs like *Ascension*, *Meditations*, and *Kulu Sé Mama* and prior to his playing on Alice's pivotal albums, the saxophonist born Farrell Sanders released his debut solo LP for Impulse! in 1967. Opening with the 17-minute "Upper Egypt & Lower Egypt," the Bob Thiele-produced *Tauhid* introduced the blistering spiritual force of a player that Ornette Coleman called "probably the best tenor player in the world."

Of Sanders' 11 outings for Impulse! the Bob Thiele-produced 1969 album *Karma* with singer Leon Thomas is his best-known, containing his modal soul jazz masterpiece "The Creator Has a Masterplan." But to hear Pharoah at his most deeply spiritual, the subsequent Ed Michel-produced albums recorded between 1970-1974, *Jewels of Thought*, *Summun Bukmun Umyun - Deaf Dumb Blind*, *Thembi*, *Village of the Pharoahs*, and *Elevation*, are equally essential.

As Ashley Kahn wrote in *The House That Trane Built*: "*Jewels of Thought* established the feel and flow of Sander's releases of this period: lengthy jams filled with percussion and world-beat rhythms and spiritual titles." The album was recorded at Plaza Sound Studios in New York on October 20, 1969. "I was working at Plaza Sound because it was at that point the New York studio with which I was most familiar, since it was Riverside's home studio, and I'd spent a lot of time there watching Orrin and working myself," says Ed Michel. "It was a huge room on the seventh floor of the Radio City Music Hall building where the symphony-sized orchestra recorded their cues."

The album featured musicians on the cusp of greatness. On bass was Cecil McBee just prior to his explorations with Strata East and Richard Davis of Muse records fame, on drums was Idris Muhammad who was soon to sign to Prestige for his debut album, joining them on piano was Flying Dutchman recruit Lonnie Liston Smith with label mate Leon Thomas providing his signature yodelling on the spiritual jazz classic "Hum-Allah-Hum-Allah-Hum-Allah."

"I wasn't prepared for Pharoah and the ensemble. We'd had conversations by phone so I knew what the instrumentation would be, and could set up in anticipation of that particular grouping, but had no idea of what the music was going to be like," says Michel. "The ensemble arrived like a caravan or perhaps an invading force. In addition to the musicians and their instruments, there were a large number of women who set up an eating-and-refreshment area well off to the side."

Once the players had set up and microphones had been adjusted, the ensemble and Michel set to work. "The band knew its business to say the very least, and our job was to get the ensemble on tape," he says. "The one particular thing I remember was listening to the basses, who were split left and right. I thought the engineer had gotten them confused, because I heard what I thought was Richard Davis on the wrong side. 'No,' I was corrected, 'All that music's coming from the kid'."

Sonically, it's an incredible album that captures the pureness of one of Pharoah's great lineups. "What you hear is what was played live. No overdubs or effects," says Michel.

THE sonic and thematic flow continued with Pharoah's next album with Ed Michel. Consisting of just two numbers – the title track and "Let Us Go Into The House of the Lord" – *Summun Bukmun Umyun - Deaf Dumb Blind* is perhaps Pharoah's greatest spiritual jazz album of this era. "The album was recorded on July 1, 1970, at A&R Studios, NY, in 8-track and engineered

by Dave Green," says Michel. The lineup was as heavy as the music, featuring saxophonist Gary Bartz, trumpeter Woody Shaw, pianist Lonnie Liston Smith, and bassist Cecil McBee. Nathaniel Bettis and Anthony Wiles accompanied the group on African percussion to join the bells, shakers, wooden flutes, thumb pianos, and whistles that became a sound signature of Sanders.

Working with Sanders had its challenges, as Ed Michel recalls of the *Summun Bukmun Umyun - Deaf Dumb Blind* session. "Since Pharoah would play at great length, I needed to find a way to signal him when he was getting near the 20-minute mark," he says. "We decided that a workable method would be to raise and lower the studio lights at about eighteen minutes, which would allow time to wind the music down. One minor problem: Pharoah played with his eyes closed."

ALONGSIDE Alice, Pharoah, and Albert Ayler, the musician most associated with spiritual jazz at Impulse! was violinist Michael White. One of Ed Michel's most inspired signings, he started out with John Handy's quintet in Oakland in the mid-sixties and had appeared with such luminaries as Sun Ra and Rahsaan Roland Kirk. But it was as a founding member of influential fusion outfit the Fourth Way that he came to prominence.

Following the group's debut self-titled LP for Capitol in 1969 and two albums for Harvest, *The Sun and Moon Have Come Together* and *Werwolf* from 1970, White debuted for Impulse! as sideman on Pharoah Sanders' 1971 LP *Thembi*, produced by Ed Michel. "I got into Michael White very deeply after hearing the track "Astral Travelling" off *Thembi*, I really loved his harmonic work on that piece and it became a magical portal for me into his other work," LA's ambient jazz percussionist and producer Carlos Niño told me in 2020 when he had just signed to International Anthem.

Recorded with Ed Michel in 1972, Michael White's two solo debuts for Impulse!, *Spirit Dance* and *Pneuma*, took John Coltrane's message of Universal Love and Pharoah's expansive world jazz as a template for his own spiritual explorations with the violin. "My music is coming from raising awareness of positive human consciousness and my contribution to humanity at large through spiritual cornerstones and vibrations from the cosmos," White, who sadly passed away in 2016, explained in his artist statement.

Produced by Ed Michel, *Spirit Dance* and *Pneuma* made White a natural successor to Stuff Smith and his hero, Ray Nance (violinist with Duke Ellington). Like his closest contemporary, Leroy Jenkins, Michael White subverted his instrument away from its European-bound traditions as part of an African American continuum. "Michael dedicated his life to playing violin since he was six years old for 80 years to the very end and was always thinking about how best to serve all people coming from diverse cultures," says singer Leisei Chen, Michael White's wife and musical partner. "He said everything we do every day musically and spiritually will reveal in our playing and to our audiences."

FOR Michael White, as with many of the artists he joined at Impulse!, music was used as a tool for spreading positive vibrations across the community. "I transport messages from another dimension, translating musically into this dimension and acting as a bridge," he explained. "I continuously deliver my music to be a healing force, bringing about the unity that jazz always provides."

Of all his albums for Impulse! his follow, *The Land of Spirit and Light*, was Michael White's most spiritually uplifting. "Michael said he was seriously researching Africa at that time, and the mask on the LP jacket had appeared in Michael's dream," says Leisei Chen. "It was Michael's own favorite album."

Produced by Ed Michel with engineer Baker Bigsby, the album was recorded in February 1973 at the Village Recorder in Los Angeles with Cecil McBee on bass, Bob King on nylon-string guitar, and Prince Lasha on assorted reed instruments. "The Village was my 'home studio' and Baker was my first call engineer, so this was working with an experienced ensemble in my most comfortable setting," says Michel.

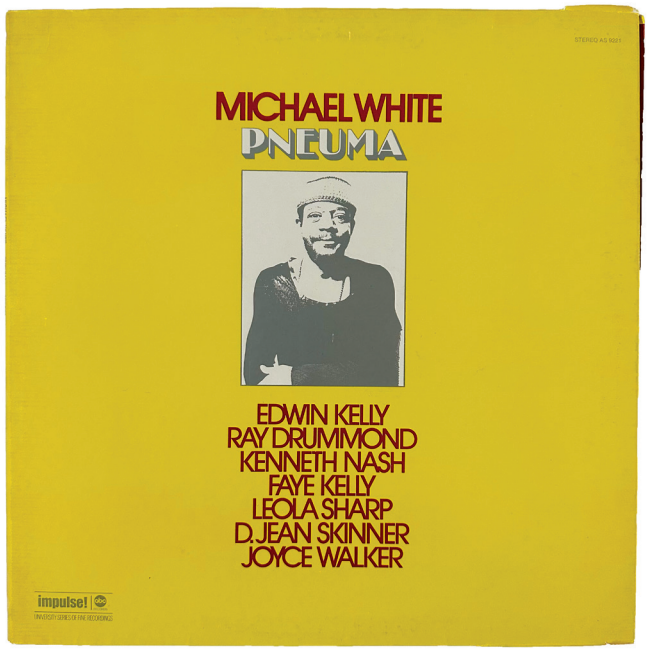
In many ways *The Land of Spirit and Light* was the archetypal Impulse! LP and one that drew on White's deep musical heritage on the West Coast. "It was music that was perfect for that time and reflects his connection to a greater music community in the San Francisco Bay Area during that most progressive era," said Carlos Niño. "I think he was definitely feeling a lot of that energy as he was really open to what was around him."

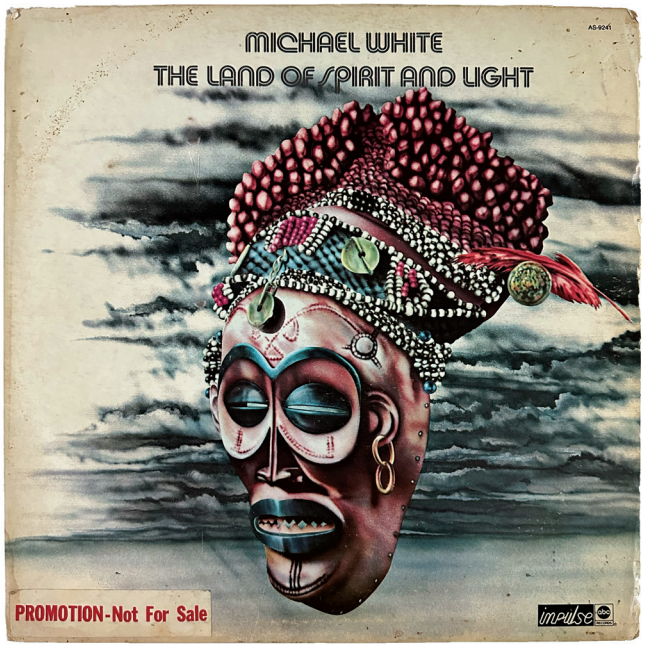
In 2009, Carlos Niño invited Michael White as a special guest to his intergenerational collective Build An Ark when they supported McCoy Tyner at Royce Hall, LA. One of the songs they performed was the sublime spiritual jazz classic "Blessing Song" from *Pneuma*, which had appeared on their 2004 album on Kindred Spirits, *Peace With Every Step*.

WHILE Archie Shepp certainly earned his reputation as one of free jazz's firebrand saxophonists, he was always a multifaceted musician who moved naturally between the avant-garde, blues, and spiritual jazz.

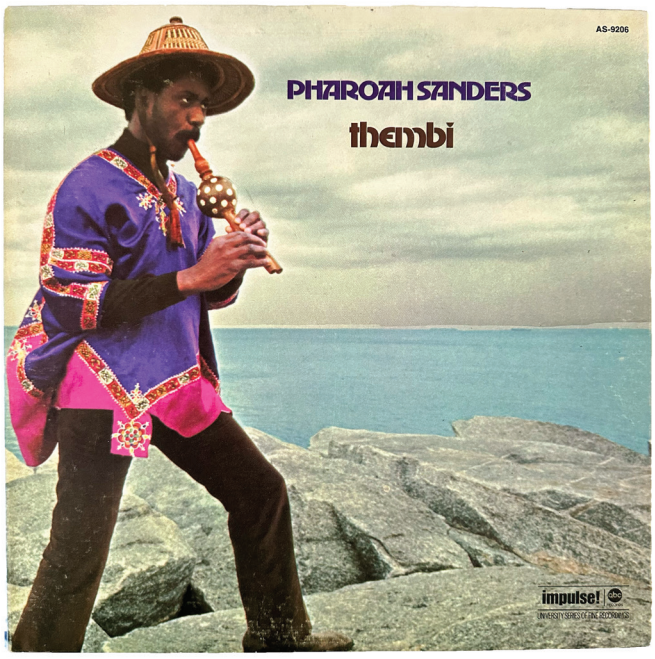
In the summer of 1969, he left for Paris, becoming one of the main American players in the avant-garde movement there, releasing a series of albums on the BYG/Actuel label, including *Blasé*, *Poem for Malcolm*, and *Yasmina, A Black Woman*. On his return to America, he drew on African American forms – from gospel to blues – on his famous Impulse! album *Attica Blues*, a response to the Attica Prison riots. The 1972 album was the third Ed Michel produced for Shepp after *For Losers* (1970) and *Things Have Got To Change* (1971).

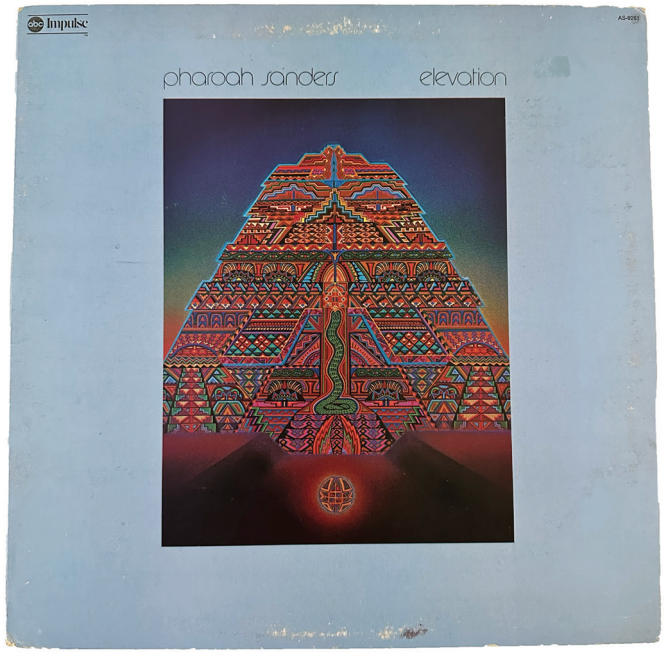
In September 1972, Michel joined Archie Shepp





Michael White *Pneuma* (Impulse! / ABC, 1972) / Michael White *The Land Of Spirit and Light* (Impulse! / ABC, 1973)





Pharoah Sanders *Thembi* (Impulse! / ABC, 1971) / Pharoah Sanders *Elevation* (Impulse! / ABC, 1974)

and a heavyweight group of players in Allegro Sound Studios, New York, for his most spiritually rooted album, *The Cry of My People*. "It's a concept in various African traditions that, rather than being a straight line from the past into the future, time is circular. And that looking back and forward simultaneously was something that Archie Shepp was focusing on," said Shabaka Hutchings. "He was looking back to gospel on this album to make something that was really hip and quite futuristic."

The album featured the Patterson Singers choir, along with jazz vocalist Andre Franklin, alternating between large ensembles, quintets, sextets, and a chamber orchestra that included Jimmy Garrison on bass, Ron Carter on electric bass, and Bernard Purdie on drums. "This let Archie work with an expanded palette of strings, voices, horns, and arrangers whose conception was reflective of the new elements developing in the music," says Ed Michel.

The Cry of My People includes the spiritual jazz laments of the title track and "A Prayer", with echoes of Max Roach's "Lonesome Lover" (featuring Abbey Lincoln) for Impulse! from 1962, composed by Cal Massey, who arranged the album. On the flip side of the LP, "African Drum Suite" mixes the soaring jazz vocal of Andre Franklin and the gospel harmonising of the Patterson Singers with Shepp's free blowing to stunning effect.

DESPITE releasing music from many of the legends of free jazz and the avant-garde, there was one towering figure that Ed Michel wanted Impulse! to sign. "It's hard to imagine an organization more independent than Sun Ra's El Saturn," Michel says. Despite this, in 1972, Michel set up a meeting between Sun Ra, his business partner Alton Abraham, and executives at ABC who presented an artist contract. "Team Saturn took it away for study and brought a revised version back the next day," recalls Michel. "They simply rewrote the agreement, reversing all the terms, so that Saturn and ABC exchanged rights and percentages. Very Cosmic. But, sadly, not well received by executives at ABC."

But to Michel's great credit, instead of a New Recording Artists deal, he negotiated a Licensing Arrangement for Saturn LPs to be released on Impulse!. In the end, nine LPs emerged on Impulse! in the early 1970s, including *Angels and Demons at Play* from 1960 and *The Magic City* from 1975. The deal also resulted in one new recording for Impulse!, *Astro Black*, produced by Ed Michel and Alton Abraham.

The connection to Impulse! was solidified when Michel was asked to produce Sun Ra's Arkestra. "I had tried to sign the Arkestra to impulse! but negotiations were unsuccessful. Bob Krasnow signed Sun Ra to Blue Thumb and asked if I would produce him," Michel recalls. "In two days, we recorded four albums' worth of music. Blue Thumb got two, *Space Is the Place*, and a second one, which somehow vanished into the cosmos. El Saturn Research got two, *Discipline 27-II* and a second one, which also somehow vanished, maybe into an alternate cosmos."

Originally released on Blue Thumb Records in 1973, *Space is the Place* was reissued by Impulse! in 1998 as interest in the enigmatic Chicago bandleader grew following his death in 1993.

Featuring the Arkestra at the height of their powers, including the "Space Ethnic" voices of a quartet of singers led by June Tyson, *Space is the Place* was recorded between October 19 and 20, 1972, at Streeterville Recording Studio, Chicago, and engineered by Baker Bigsby. "In 1972, Streeterville was the only 16-track facility in Chicago. All that meant was that they had a 16-track recorder and there were sixteen inputs between the studio and the control room," says Michel. "Fortunately, we were able to borrow small submixers from a film-sound facility, so we could deal with the fact that there were four complete drum sets in use, all of the saxophonists required multiple-micing, and everybody functioned as a percussionist. And dancers were moving through the studio at all times."

Working with Sun Ra was another eye-opener for the vastly experienced Michel. "As with all the Sun Ra events I have experienced, nothing was what I expected, and nothing was not illuminating," he recalls. "During the mix sessions, Mr. Ra fell asleep and snored really loudly. He awoke when the tape stopped, surveyed the room, and noted, 'You Earth people sleep too much'."

THE year 1974 would be a prolific one for Ed Michel at Impulse! with studio sessions ranging from Sam Rivers' *Crystals* and Marion Brown's *Vista* (featuring the spiritual jazz number "Maimoun") to Keith Jarrett's *Death And The Flower*. But in 1975, as these albums hit the shelves, ABC let Michel go as it restructured its whole operation. On leaving Impulse! Michel continued where he left off, producing Alice Coltrane's albums for Warner Bros and a series of albums with pianist Stanley Cowell at Galaxy, the Fantasy sublabel he became most associated with in the mid to late '70s after his exit from Impulse!

Under the new direction of Esmond Edwards, Impulse! lost much of its identity – including the heavy gatefold sleeves under belt tightening measures – as the label sought to, in the words of Edwards, "mount a stronger push into contemporary mainstream jazz."

But nearly half a century on, the legacy of the artists reverberates in a new generation of players. "I feel that Impulse! as a label was very ahead of its time, and I see a parallel with what is happening today in that it wasn't concerned with what a jazz label is supposed to be," said Shabaka Hutchings. "It was concerned with the possibilities of the artists that were associated with jazz and the outer limits of what they could achieve. When I listen to these records, it really feels like they weren't saying this is what jazz is. They were saying this is what music can be."

And it was Ed Michel who gave these musicians

the freedom to explore what jazz could be. The result is a lasting legacy that is now being upheld by the reborn Impulse! through a new vanguard of creatively free musicians that includes Shabaka, Irreversible Entanglements, and Brandee Younger.

Here we go deeper into Ed Michel's story and his time at Impulse!.

ANDY THOMAS: *What were your foundations as a producer?*

ED MICHEL: I learned by hanging out in studios to watch musicians. The key environment for me was Radio Recorders in Hollywood, where many Pacific Jazz sessions were recorded. Most sessions were mono, and almost 100% of the time, everything was done 'live', which worked great. I thought of the sound of music as a single Gestalt; you'd get the sound down and make sure you could hear everything clearly. I noticed engineers were particularly fussy about drummers and spent a little extra time getting the bass clear.

Then I hung out at a Chet Baker session at a large, empty theatre in LA, and in addition to the mics used to make the master, an outsider set up a dummy head with a pair of mics where the ears belonged, and produced a two-track binaural tape. Before long, everybody was recording two sets of masters, the mono and stereo versions. I was bitten by the future, and by 1962, I was in New York working for Riverside.

By the late '60's, I was in New York from LA to record Ahmad Jamal. I was warned, "He eats little producers for breakfast." Four-track. Stereo piano. He didn't mind, nor did he eat me for breakfast. It was Ramadan, and he was fasting. He liked the piano and the stereo.

AT: *Could you talk about your early days at Impulse!?*

EM: Bill Szymczyk moves to LA and has the office across the hall from me in the producers' weirdo ghetto. We hang out in the studio. I am the recipient of a master class in sound recording. It had never occurred to me that the drums have a sound, and the bass has a sound, and the piano has a sound, and the rhythm guitar has a sound considerably different than the solo guitar. I had always known that Johnny Hodges had a sound different from Charlie Parker, Ben Webster from Wardell Grey, but never considered this. I was still listening to the Gestalt.

AT: *How and why was Impulse! so important to the continuum of jazz in the late '60s and early '70s?*

EM: Musicians as well as record buyers thought of Impulse! as "Coltrane's label." This, despite the immense and important body of work he'd previously done for Prestige and Atlantic. But the Impulse! recordings represented the last changes of musical direction he made. Bob Thiele and I couldn't help but be aware of this. And even the corporate 'suits' at ABC took this into consideration. It had a lot to do with the kind of artists we could sign and record.

AT: *How do you think Impulse! stood apart from other jazz labels at the time, like Blue Note?*

EM: Putting aside the question of aesthetics and recording/production style, one important consideration was that Impulse! had major-label distribution, so the parent corporation owned its own distributors. This meant the label could ship more records to distributors and had a lot to do with the way a new, and possibly marginally commercial artist, could be handled. It also meant that there was usually a larger advertising and promotion budget available.

AT: *How do you think your era at Impulse! differed from that of Bob Thiele?*

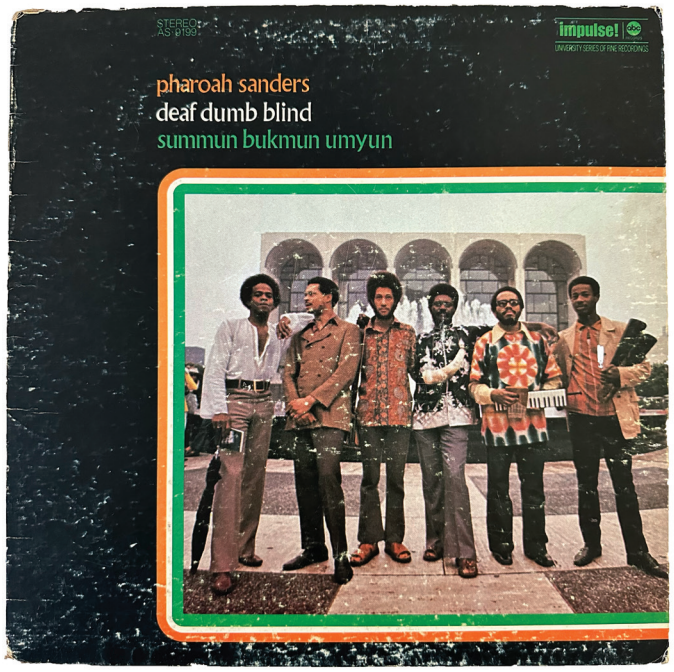
EM: First of all, Bob came from the generation before mine, and the years that separated us gave us substantially different aesthetics. Another key difference was that Bob was a New York guy, and during his tenure at Impulse!, he was based there. Now that meant he approached the music with a certain kind of attitude that was different than I had as an LA guy. I came into the picture when the label moved its headquarters to LA, and management shifted from the New York guys.

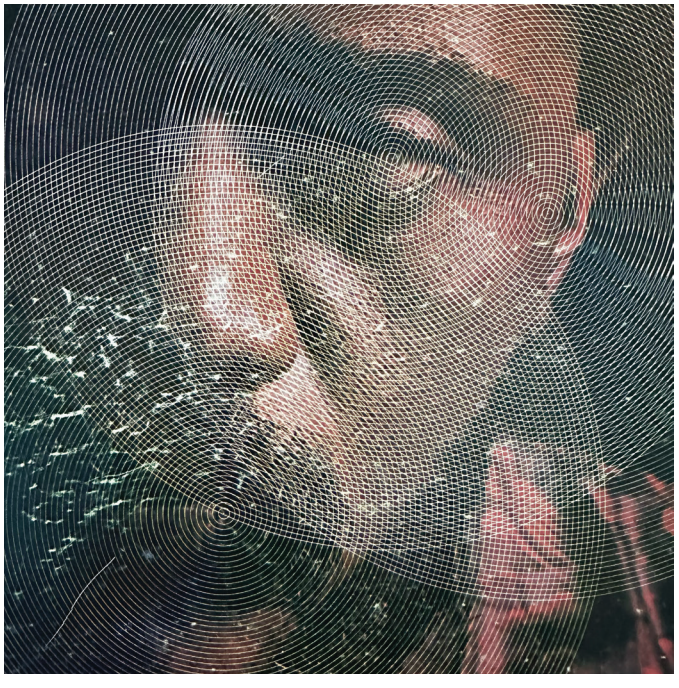
There was also the fact that recording technology was changing pretty rapidly. Things went from mono to two-track to four-track to eight-track to sixteen and then twenty-four track in less time than it takes to type it. And post-Beatles engineering, which grew from the rock side, had a massive impact on the way a producer could record an artist to more accurately represent the way they sounded live.

AT: *How would you describe your production aesthetic?*

EM: I am still governed by a sense of recording the music all at once. The magic happens as a result of musicians responding to what's going on right now. I still have a sense that it's the engineer's job to get the sound of the instruments right, but now I'm much more concerned with every instrument's sound and bringing them together accurately.

One very serious approach to sound recording is to record the space in which the sound is happening. If you're working with a good acoustic space, that method is accurate and definitely non-invasive. But multitrack recording offers you the opportunity to mic individuals or sections specifically to capture the unique aspects of the players at hand, and if you're careful enough, capture some of the qualities of interplay between the instruments. It works fine, and it's the way most pop production is done. But I find it inappropriate for improvised music.





Pharoah Sanders *Summun Bukmun Umyun - Deaf Dumb Blind* **(Impulse! / ABC, 1970)**

AT: *So what is the key to getting the right sound from improvised music?*

EM: The key seems to be in the mixing. Getting the right blend of those separate but recorded at the same time elements is exactly as delicate as cooking. I tried to always have the artist on hand for the mix, because they knew what the music was like, and would keep me from mishandling an important balance element.

In the early to mid '70's, there was the arrival of quad four channels, and, better still, a way to encode those four channels so they'd play back as stereo until you decoded them into quad. Wherever and whenever possible, I mixed to encoded quad/stereo. We always mixed in stereo, and once the stereo mix was approved, we'd unfold it into quad.

AT: *How much creative freedom were you given by Impulse!?*

EM: The reality was that the parent label couldn't communicate with the Impulse! artist. There was simply no commonality of communicative medium. So the producer, that is me, had to translate between the two distant galaxies. The record company wanted a product it could sell. The artist wanted albums that could sell. But ones that represented the music they were making with enough accuracy that audiences showing up for live performances wouldn't be disappointed. I saw my job as being, if you'll excuse the clumsy expression, an honest broker.

AT: *How did you manage to do this?*

EM: I took the budgets from the record company and translated them into master tapes that reflected the artists' intent. I felt my principal responsibility was to the artist. First of all, I was a fan; second, the albums would be around longer than the suits. But at the same time, I realized that if I didn't come up with a saleable product, I wouldn't keep being a producer. The key was managing the budget, knowing what it would cost to get the master that would sell enough copies to show a reasonable profit on the amount of that budget.

AT: *Could you give any insights into the spiritual jazz records you produced for Impulse!?*

EM: I have never experienced a sense of spirituality myself, so I don't feel qualified to analyse that aspect of the music. Turiyasangitananda Alice Coltrane used to be amused to the point of heavy laughter when I told her I couldn't even meditate. She said that when we were recording and mixing, I was meditating, fixing to bust. When I said that I was just concentrating on the music, and how could it be meditating if I didn't know or think it was meditating, she laughed so hard she almost fell out of her chair.