

Brainwashed - Charles Tyler, "Eastern Man Alone"

Written by Duncan Edwards

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This 1967 recording features an intriguing line-up of alto sax, cello, and two bass players. Since Tyler played on Albert Ayler's *Bells and Spirits Rejoice* it is no surprise that on his own album he challenges the other musicians to explore restless improvisation and avoid locking into too much of a groove.

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In the wrong hands, this kind of improvising can be extremely alienating for some listeners who perhaps suspect that this is almost made up as it goes along. However, as was noted by Brian Priestley in 1988:

"just like improvisation in comedy (or, indeed, in conversation) it requires a knowledge of the language; and it requires having something to say or, at least, a point of view (and, in performance involving two or more people, it requires a responsiveness to others' points of view). Above all, it is necessary to have a conviction that the act of improvisation is in some ways superior to making prepared statements, and that is something not easily acquired in Western societies."

Charles Tyler's approach communicates a belief in freedom and expression and *Eastern Man Alone* sets about building bridges between players and listeners from the opening bars of the first piece, "Cha-Lacey's Out East." It's not a fantastically memorable riff but does provide enough of a solid basis to justify the ensuing 12 minutes of deviations and tangents. Overall, the album's sense of almost continual movement is more rewarding than disorienting or annoying. The bassists might have engaged in more of a tussle, but in addition to Tyler's deep and howling alto tone there is plenty of textural variety from David Baker's cello.

The third (and shortest) of the albums' four pieces, "Le-Roi," seems to be the most intense and

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spirited. The cello and basses anchor the tune and gnaw away at everything as if in a Claude Makelele-inspired trance. This allows Tyler's sax the freedom to wander. It could also be that the running order is vitally important and the opening two pieces serve to warm the ears up to hear just what is going on. After several complete listens to this album I was hearing (or imagining) all sorts of obliquely phrased references: everything from "Waltzing Matilda" and Salvation Army hymns to "The Star Spangled Banner." *Eastern Man Alone* is a worthwhile reissue from Charles Tyler, who started playing clarinet aged seven, and also played piano and baritone. In his 40s Tyler moved to France, where he died in 1992.