

SPRING 2005 | issue 37

# SIGNAL to NOISE

the Journal of Improvised & Experimental Music

[www.signaltonoisemagazine.com](http://www.signaltonoisemagazine.com)

POB 585, Winooski VT 05404



## 14. HAROLD BUDD

Story: Colin Buttimer | Photos: Matt Budd

## 16. DAVID S. WARE QUARTET

Story: Ed Hazell | Photos: Michael Galinsky

## 22. SUSAN ALCORN

Story & Photo: Pete Gershon

## 24. GENESIS P-ORRIDGE

Interview: John Kruth | Photos: Caroline Bell

## 8. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

BUCK 65; HAIR POLICE; HOOD

## 34. LIVE REVIEWS

London Jazz Festival; Morr Music Festival (Chicago); Jazz Festival Munster (Germany);  
Benefit for the Wilder Cats (Amherst, Massachusetts)

## 38. BOOK REVIEWS

Right to Rock: the Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race ;  
Noise of the World: Non-Western Artists in Their Own Words

## 40. CD REVIEWS

Over 170 new releases and reissues considered

---

# TOUCHING ON THE TRANSCENDENTAL

**Tenor titan David S. Ware leads one of the most enduring bands in avant-garde jazz, his music fueled by an awareness of the cosmic self and the common language of sound.  
Story by Ed Hazell, Photos by Michael Galinsky**



There's a Sufi adage that says one should be "in the world, but not of it." If any musician has tried to live up to that ideal, it's saxophonist David S. Ware. His quartet's new 3-CD set of concert recordings is called *Live in the World*, but according to Ware the music comes from a place that is not of it, it comes from a transcendent spiritual plain. "For me, this is what life on earth is supposed to be about. It's supposed to be going toward a higher reality," he says. "For me, the spiritual gives meaning to what I do. The playing, the traveling, and all the hard times — it gives it all meaning."

The meaning of his music and his intent for it are the keys to understanding Ware's art and its overwhelming urgency. The technical or formal aspects of what he does, the way he composes, the way his long-established quartet works together — in other words, the worldly aspects of his art — are important. But with Ware, as with any artist working in the lineage of John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, and Pharoah Sanders, if you don't pay attention to what he says about the spiritual motivations and metaphysical content of his music, you not only miss critical reasons the music takes the shape that it does, you also miss his point.

"I want to ignite people, like you ignite a fire," Ware says of his intentions for the music. "I want them to walk away, in a sense, ignited on some level, so that they can manifest changes in their lives. The music is supposed to make people think and to try to raise their awareness and consciousness up towards the Supreme Being or the supreme reality. I want the music to move them to the point where they want to enter into and stay in that world of beauty all the time. This is why I play music. For me, music has always run parallel with spirituality."

Wrestling with problems of spirituality in a material world — being in the world, but not of it — is as ancient as humanity's first imaginings of a higher power — and as universal. It is Ware's particular genius to travel across the interface between the material and spiritual worlds along the intertwining paths of Eastern religions and African American music and to make out of this journey some of today's most invigorating and demanding music. The dynamic relationship between the physical and metaphysical at the heart of the music on *Live in the World* is the key to its joyfulness, its cathartic energy, its turbulence and fluidity, its discipline and clarity, its dreadful otherworldliness, and its touching humanity.

The third disc in the new Thirsty Ear set features a version of Sonny Rollins' 1958 classic, *Freedom Suite*, recorded in Milan in 2003. It exemplifies the way Ware manipulates his material for deeper spiritual content. "We did 'Freedom Suite' a number of times throughout Europe," Ware says. "On this particular concert, we decided that we'd

been doing it a certain way, a certain way, a certain way, so let's try to open it up even more and break up the form a little bit. That's exactly what happened in that concert, we broke up the form and built various parts of it differently that we had. During the concert, I knew that we touched on the transcendental several times as we played it. Sometimes you don't realize what you're touching upon, but this is one of those rare occasions when we did realize that we were touching on the transcendental. The music transcended, it went beyond itself, it went beyond playing music and it touched upon the spiritual plane.

"This is one of the ultimate things in musical experience, to touch upon that universal, that cosmic reality, that makes us all related," Ware continues. "That makes us, all human beings on this planet, truly brothers and sisters. When they say 'self' in Yoga, they mean God; they don't mean the small, individual self, but the larger cosmic Self. This is what makes us all brothers and sisters. This is why you should love your neighbor as yourself, because on that spiritual level it is yourself. Not the outer self, but the inner most being is the same in all of us. That's what the music touched."

Ware selected the music on the two other discs — a 1998 concert from Chiasso, Switzerland with Susie Ibarra on drums, and a 2003 concert from Terni, Italy featuring Hamid Drake on drums — because he feels it also touches on the transcendental.

On "Mikuro's Blues" from the Chiasso concert, Ware sculpts radiant phrases that flow inexorably toward a climactic revelation in sound. That same session yields a majestic outpouring from Ware on "The Way We Were" From Terni, Ware's solo on "Elder's Path" seems driven simultaneously inward and upward as linear melodic variations give way to deeply contoured waves of abstract sound. "Manu's Ideal" is steeped in deep sorrow and grief that crests into a healing surge of compassion and consolation. In many ways, Shipp is the bedrock around and over which the music flows. His shifting textures and chords of contrasting densities and colors roll in wavelike motions behind Ware on the Chiasso version of "Aquarian Sound." His interplay with Parker and Ibarra is magically close on "Logistic," with beautifully synchronized motion between a stated and implied beat. Parker feints and darts beneath them, creating rhythmic tensions as his lines move in across the music's pulse. His arco bass shadows the movements and contours of Ware's tenor in a remarkable display of empathy on "Sentient Compassion" from the Terni concert. Each drummer brings something different to the group and modifies its character. One of the great pleasures of the set is hearing how each one navigates an individual path through the music.

On every track, each member of the quartet is free to explore, yet tethered to a core that keeps them circling in coherent formations at all times. There is an equally of expression and a sense of collective storytelling as strong as any that's existed in improvised music, a jigsaw of individual voices that fits together seamlessly. One reason for the quartet's strength as a collective is Ware's method of putting the music together. It's a method that acknowledges both the composer's intent and the performer's essential value in realizing that intent. Arrangements are often created by playing and working through ideas in rehearsal; they feel spontaneous because they are. In addition, this lends the group a signature sound because the material is a natural outgrowth of the musical personalities that developed them.

"David has a pretty big scope as a composer and even his most minimal sketches suggest so much that I'm just going off what he gives to us," Shipp says. "He hired us because of our styles, so I think there's a premise at the very beginning that stylistically we match up and he can trust whatever we come up with. Sometimes he does have very specific ideas; he'll want a certain bass line or a certain style of bass line or a certain form of accompaniment. I can start out using a staccato jazzy sort of accompaniment and he'll say, 'Now, I don't want that, I want more of a rolling sound, more of a sustained sound.' Sometimes he'll come in with a line, because a lot of his things are just lines, and we come up with a progression, although sometimes he does have a harmonic structure. It differs from composition to composition."

"He really created his own language within the common language of sound," Parker observes. "He's doing things his way without feeding directly off of what people have done in the past. He puts the music together in a way that's similar to the way Cecil [Taylor] puts his music together — in phrases — but it comes out differently. He doesn't put together a 32 bar song, but phrases that are connected and not really regulated by a set of changes. David doesn't really play off changes, but off melody. Melody can imply harmonic changes, but also rhythmic changes. And we follow the thrust of the music, the propulsion of the music that goes into upper registers of sound."

"In concert, David never tells you what you're going to play before you play it," Parker continues. "You have a whole big book of tunes, and you never know what you're going to play, never tells you how it's going to be played or when. After the rehearsals, it's pretty open as you what you have to do. There's a trust in there that you can do the right thing or the music will guide you do to the right thing in the performance of the music itself. That's where he's coming from. One of the things I got reinforced about working with David, is

**“I want to ignite people, like you ignite a fire ... The music is supposed to make people think and to try to raise their awareness and consciousness up towards the Supreme Being or the supreme reality.”**



