

# SONNY SIMMONS

Manhattan Egos 

1. COLTRANE IN PARADISE
2. THE PROBER
3. MANHATTAN EGOS
4. SEVEN DANCES OF SALOME
5. VISIONS

**Sonny Simmons:** alto sax &  
English horn

**Barbara Donald:** trumpet

**Juma:** bass & congo drums

**Paul Smith:** drums

**Voodoo Bembe:** congo drums  
(on "Seven Dances" only)

6. BEINGS OF LIGHT
7. PURPLE RAYS
8. DIVINE MAGNET
9. THE BEAUTY OF IBIS

**Sonny Simmons:** alto sax

**Michael White:** violin

**Eddie Marshall:** drums

**Kenny Jenkins:** bass

# 1 – 5: Recorded at Sierra Sound Studios, Berkeley, Ca. 2/10/1969

Produced by Chris Strachwitz & Sonny Simmons

# 6 – 9: Recorded "live" at the Newman Center, Berkeley, Ca. 11/6/1970 on a 2 track Magnecord reel to reel recorder by Chris Strachwitz with guidance from Wes Robinson

Photos by Patti Prout, except Page 7 photo by Doug Muir  
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# SONNY SIMMONS

Manhattan Egos

plus  
previously  
unreleased bonus  
live recording  
featuring violinist

**Michael White**



## A NOTE BY RALPH J. GLEASON:

Allen Ginsberg calls it “the revolution of the psyche.” A Russian poet spoke of “a conspiracy of feelings” and Ken Kesey says that it is a “neon renaissance ... a need to find a new way to look at the world, an attempt to locate a better reality...”

What they are speaking of is the central theme that runs through all the arts today. You find it expressed by poets, by dancers, by painters, by novelists, by musicians. It is, in truth, a conspiracy of feelings, a universal assumption on the part of artists that the creative act is the only defense of life against the machine, against the juggernaut of namelessness, facelessness, dehumanized structural organizations that are grinding down the human being.

The movement may be viewed as religious in the sense that all creativity is religious and in its recognition that we are all one, that everything is everything and each a part of all the rest.

The movement is underway now, well underway, and it will travel a long road before it has run its course and in the doing there is every indication that it will brighten the world with art in all its forms to an extent never before imagined by man.

Music is at its core. Sonny Simmons told Nat Hentoff “There was a feeling inside of me that drove me to express music,” a statement that is so universal in its application one can hear it from Bach to Stravinsky to Varese to Bird to Trane to Ornette. It is there, imbedded in all of the new artistic drive – the urge to express, to create, to communicate to other humans this vision that is burning inside the artist’s mind. It is a vision of the world that is totally opposed to the materialistic, mechanistic machine ridden society (“if my thought dreams could be seen, they’d probably put my head in a guillotine” Bob Dylan sang) and Charlie Parker pointed to it saying “Now’s the Time.”

The reality of it jelled in my mind the week before this album was made when, in a remarkable two day series of performances by new jazz groups, I saw some of the same people and some of the same musicians I ordinarily saw at the centers of the new electronic music, deeply involved with this new jazz. And this new jazz' newness, I suggest, is more in concept than otherwise ("it's more about feelings than notes" Albert Ayler said).

All the labels are changing and it is no surprise – or should be no surprise – that art should be out in front as it always has been. This is a world in which the values and assumptions of generations are changing, in which black is beautiful, and there is no ugly because humanity is where it all is at. And, as Lenny Bruce said, if you find something about the human body distasteful, "complain to the manufacturer."

It is all being re-evaluated, which really means revising the priorities and the assumptions and the scale of values. Thus the introduction into

poetry and music of sounds that were not acceptable. "What would you think if I sang out of tune" Ringo Starr sang and implied the whole re-evaluation of music that says it is no longer an artistic law that A=440. Whose A? What is A? How do you measure life by mathematics? Young people whose parents would bow only to European scales and musical systems, now listen with all their being to Usted Ali Akbar Khan and Ravi Shankar and A=440 has no meaning in that context.

"Jazz is playin' from the heart, you don't lie." An old man said that. Willie G. "Bunk" Johnson from New Iberia, Louisiana, and Sonny Simmons from Sicily Island, Louisiana, 25 years later says "if you tell the truth about a certain event or thing or place ... it frees you ... and this is the way we feel about this music. When we express truly how we feel, we become able to express more freedom...."

We are entering an age of the flowering of art. An age wherein man

will devote more and more of himself to art and as we do this it will become more and more apparent that the things on this planet, the colors and the sounds, the minerals and the plants and all of it together are organized in a beautiful, musical way we had forgotten. There is no arbitrary definition. There never really was. Art knows no definition. What was it Bird said? There's no dividing line to art?

For all its life, Jazz has fought the discrimination implicit in "where's the melody?" Open your ears. In his remarkable lyric to Miles Davis' "Four" Jon Hendricks said it: "Everybody here's got ears / Only gotta teach 'em how to use 'em – not abuse 'em. . .

The music on this album is pure and free and it expresses the souls of the musicians who played it because that is how it is with the new art. There's no hiding, no shadows and symbols, but an opening of the heart. It is this opening of the heart – this conspiracy of feelings – that attracts the young people of this world because it is the

force of life and that force is absolutely essential to the survival of the human race, no matter where or how or by whom it is expressed.

Everybody here's got ears, so use them to listen. Let the music in, let it in on its own terms and it fills you to overflowing, within you and without you. Art is the sworn enemy of preconceived notions, the implacable foe of institutionalized order, and entrenched academies. Art is freedom. Art is love. Art is life, to be felt, to be heard, to be experienced.

That's where this music is at because that is where the future – and the hope – lies.

Ralph J. Gleason – 1969

## THE MUSICIANS

"I'm not a musician by profession, but by nature – it's an ordained, divine gift which I have inherited," Sonny Simmons told me when I talked with him after the session. Yet he always renders a superb, highly structured, and yet free, emotion charged performance at appearances with his groups as well illustrated by the two remarkable ensembles heard here.

**Huey "Sonny" Simmons**, the oldest of eight boys, was born August 4, 1933, in Cicily Island, north Louisiana, not far from where Leadbelly grew up. The family originally came from Trinidad. Although Sonny's father, Jake, was a Baptist minister who sang and played drums while his mother, Bessie also sang in church, his parents also practiced voodoo. The music which went with it totally enchanted young Huey, who recalls that the "music healed people – it took me away and

stayed with me." In 1943 when shipyard work was plentiful, the family moved to Oakland, California and in 1948 Sonny's mother bought him a tenor sax. Illinois Jacquet became an early idol but Sonny listened to all the giants in the jazz field who came to the West Coast but soon fell under the spell of Charlie Parker. Sonny also paid his dues playing with rhythm and blues bands backing singers like Lowell Fulson and T-Bone Walker. By 1961 he landed a job with Charlie Mingus at the Jazz Workshop in San Francisco and moved more and more in the avant garde direction. Sonny made his first record with Prince Lasha in 1962 for Contemporary Records and the following year went to New York. Largely at the urging of Wes Robinson who organized the semi annual Berkeley Jazz Symposia, Sonny Simmons returned to the West Coast in 1969.

**Barbara Donald** born in Minneapolis, Minn. on September 2, 1942, started to get interested in music at the age of two. First she took to the piano and her main interest was classical music until 1954 when she became aware of jazz and soon admired the music of Clifford Brown, Fats Navarro, and Miles Davis. When she was seventeen Barbara went to New York with a rock band but soon decided to move on to the West Coast where she met Sonny Simmons at a San Diego jazz club. In the 1960s they got married and they have two children, Zarak, born in 1965 and daughter Raisha, born in 1972.

**Juma** is a Californian born in Monrovia on April 23, 1942. He studied art at UCLA and for a time was a sculptor, painter, and jewelry maker who also enjoyed playing baritone, tuba, guitar, and trumpet and was into the folk music scene as a teenager. When Juma became involved with jazz he went to New York where he was part of the AMS

(Aboriginal Music Society). He met Sonny Simmons about six years ago and has worked with him very closely for the past year and a half.

**Paul Smith**, the youngest member of the group, was born January 29, 1947, in Oakland, California. His late father was a drummer and sympathetic to Paul's interests. When Paul was five he got his first set of drums and was soon playing in Berkeley's LeConte Grammar School's symphony and marching bands. Paul played all through junior high school but it wasn't until high school that he finally became totally committed to being a musician. After high school he played with rock bands for a while but then went into seclusion for a year to develop all facets of drumming and himself more fully. At the urging of Sonny Simmons, whom he met in San Francisco a few years ago, Paul took off for New York where he says he "discovered real poverty, not just the conventional kind – but a poverty of ideas especially in the East Village



which is not conducive to warmth and love.” Yet he did have a chance to play some unforgettable music with Sonny and Barbara, with Pharoah Sanders,

and Albert Ayler. Paul played a concert with the Ayler brothers at Town Hall which was taped but he does not know if it will ever be released.

The very informal second session features the violin (or fiddle) of **Michael White** as a second voice to Sonny Simmons' alto sax. Michael was born in Houston, Tx. on May 24, 1933, but grew up in Oakland, California. Michael White first came to the attention of most jazz fans when as a member of the John Handy Quintet (along with guitarist Jerry Hahn) he made a very successful appearance at the 1965 Monterey Jazz Festival. The group had a very unique sound blending many elements which were becoming part of the popular music scene during the hip psychedelic 1960s! Jerry Hahn's guitar was blending jazz, Indian, and rock elements and Michael contributed his incredible energy as well as the peaceful almost mystic aspect of his personality. Arhoolie Records recorded

an album at the time featuring guitarist Jerry Hahn and Michael White's violin backed by a strong rhythm section consisting of Ron McClure on bass and Jack DeJohnette on drums (this session is now available on Arhoolie CD 9011). Michael later worked with the jazz-rock group, the Fourth Way and recorded with Pharoah Sanders, McCoy Tyner and Joe Henderson. He played with many of the big names such as John Coltrane, Sun Ra, Eric Dolphy, Wes Montgomery, etc. and recorded albums under his own name for Impulse. Michael was in San Francisco in February 2000 recording again with Sonny Simmons. Let's hope we will soon also hear the results of their most recent collaboration.

Chris Strachwitz-1969  
(up-dated March 2000)

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### PRODUCER'S NOTE:

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Thirty years have past since we released the LP entitled "Manhattan Egos" by Sonny Simmons on my

Arhoolie label. I have enjoyed traditional jazz ever since seeing the film "New Orleans" which exposed my

European ears to the marvelous music of Louis Armstrong, Kid Ory, Billie Holiday, and Meade Lux Lewis among others. Within a few years I became captivated by Country/Hillbilly, Gospel, Rhythm & Blues, Mexican and other vernacular musics. I was not moved by the "cool" jazz scene nor Bebop but did hear Charlie Parker by chance once at the SayWhen club on Bush Street in San Francisco. He shared the bill with the Trenier Twins who had a big hit with "Hadacol, That's All" and who's rocking R&B sound drew me to the club. In the 1960s when psychedelic rock was the rave among young white folks, black musicians were rapidly developing a powerful new sound frequently called "free jazz". During her brief visit to the Bay Area, Gudrun Endress of the German magazine "Jazz Podium" introduced me to this music when she suggested we hear John Coltrane at the Jazz Workshop. Accompanied by two drummers, Rashid Ali and Elvin Jones, I was absolutely overwhelmed by the emotions,

dynamics and sheer power of the music. With two drummers in a small club you were not only surrounded by the rhythm section but you felt totally immersed in the sounds of the music. The music that night hit me in much the same way as that of the New Orleans clarinetist George Lewis, when I first heard him in person "live" around 1951.

I had recorded Blues, Zydeco, Cajun, Mexican, Country and similar vernacular traditions for my Arhoolie label for several years, when I was introduced to John Coltrane and subsequently other "free jazz" players. I was especially taken by Sonny Simmons when Wes Robinson, fan and promoter, suggested I go hear him. Sonny's music seemed to be the closest to what I had heard from the Coltrane group. He seemed to have that same fierce, powerful sound but at the same time a bit of the R&B or Down Home funk I had come to admire so in vernacular black music of that time. Although I had very little money, we went to a studio to record "Manhattan Egos." On

other occasions however, I took my portable Magnecord reel to reel recorder, several mikes and a mixer to tape "live" concerts or sessions. The second part of this CD is the result of one such program where Sonny Simmons was joined by violinist Michael White accompanied by a power-house rhythm section consisting of Eddie Marshall and Kenny Jenkins. I mixed the drum and bass mikes on one track and the two "horns" on the other with the hope of making a better mono mix later. Stereo was just coming on the market and most of us thought that meant something on the left channel and something on the right one! In spite of or perhaps because of the technical difficulties I encountered, (the sound of the violin was very cold while the bass was overpowering my mike but giving it a wonderful distorted "fuzz tone"

effect!) the recording is a pretty honest audio snapshot of what you heard that night. And Sonny Simmons agreed after he heard a cassette of this session and we arranged for the release of this material on CD. I have always admired hot fiddlers whether they be Cajun, Mexican, Country, Gypsy, Balkan, Ethnic, jazz or blues, one of the world's most delightful and versatile instruments, the fiddle was present in the earliest jazz bands. From the swing era Stuff Smith was my favorite and he continued to rule right into the Bebop era making some superb recordings with Dizzy Gillespie. Today Claude "Fiddler" Williams (note Arhoolie CDs 405, 406, & 434) is still playing lovely swing jazz fiddle, but in the avant garde field Michael White is kind of a "lone cat."

Chris Strachwitz – March 2000

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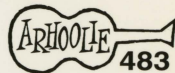
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**Sonny Simmons** is one of the greats on the avant garde or free jazz scene and has recently made a come-back after a 20 year hiatus due to family and economic problems. This is a re-issue of a 1969 session which Will Smith in the January 1970 issue of "Jazz & Pop" called: "this, his finest album ... Sonny's conception ... is a mixture of blowtorch fire and embracing lyricism, an amalgam of old and new." In the 3rd edition of the All Music Guide to Jazz (1998) this album is given top rating of five stars! To this superb album we have added a previously unreleased concert from 1970 of Sonny Simmons teamed up with violinist Michael White of John Handy Quintet fame backed by San Francisco drummer supreme, Eddie Marshall and bassist Kenny Jenkins. In February of 2000 Sonny Simmons and Michael White were reunited for a recording session in San Francisco and we hope to hear the results very soon!



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10341 San Pablo Ave  
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