

ScienSonic Laboratories makes historic reunion recording on the 50th anniversary of Sun Ra's classic *Heliocentric Worlds*



Marshall Allen, Richard Alderson, and the bass marimba that Sun Ra played on *Heliocentric Worlds* in 1965
(photo by Scott Robinson)

On April 20, 1965, one of the all-time classic recordings of adventurous and far-reaching music was made in New York City. The great Sun Ra and his Solar Arkestra convened in engineer Richard L. Alderson's RLA Studio and crafted an amazing and enigmatic recording which still astonishes listeners to this day, and is revered by fans of creative music around the world. *The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra* was issued on Bernard Stollman's forward-looking ESP label, and it sounds like no other record made by anyone, anywhere, ever. Somewhere between outer space chamber music and avant-garde jazz, it introduced 1965 listeners to sounds not normally heard in improvised music such as timpani, piccolo, and the haunting bass marimba. Some months later, *Volume Two* followed with the addition of chromatic sets of "tuned bongos" and the eerie, electronic Clavioline. The unusual and distinctive sonic palette of these two recordings, along with an advanced musical methodology which blurs the lines between composition and improvisation, makes for utterly unique music which truly lives up to the admonition on the back of the original LP jackets, "YOU NEVER HEARD SUCH SOUNDS IN YOUR LIFE."

Now, exactly fifty years later, ScienSonic Laboratories has created an historic recording in the spirit of *Heliocentric Worlds*. On April 20, 2015, original participant Marshall Allen (now 91, and highly active as leader of the Arkestra) was brought in from Philadelphia, along with longtime Arkestra member Danny Thompson, to bring this music to life. Original engineer Richard Alderson - who had not worked with Allen since the *Heliocentric* sessions in 1965 - was tracked down and recruited to engineer the date. Making it all even more remarkable was the presence of the original bass marimba that Sun Ra played on *Heliocentric Worlds* - the very same instrument - which is in the possession of ScienSonic laboratories, and resides in its New Jersey facility. This made for a truly historic three-way reunion - fifty years later to the day! - between Allen, Alderson, and the original instrument that figured so prominently on the 1965 LP. This in itself was quite a remarkable confluence of events... but yet another strange twist was added when word reached us, during the sessions, of the passing of Bernard Stollman - the man whose ESP label issued the iconic *Heliocentric* LPs - on the very same day.



Marshall Allen plays the bass marimba (photo by Danny Thompson)

In what may be another historic first, Marshall Allen played ScienSonic's Steinway grand piano on the new recording, in addition to his customary alto sax and EVI. He also performed on the bass marimba (as did tenor saxophonist and mastermind of the project, Scott Robinson) and did some directing. Danny Thompson played baritone sax and flute. The rest of the original instrumentation was duplicated exactly, with an incredible cast of some of New York's most creative musicians: Frank Lacy, Philip Harper, Pat O'Leary, Yosvany Terry, Tim Newman, Matt Wilson and JD Parran. It was a marathon day, with the second half being devoted to the slightly smaller instrumentation of *Heliocentric Worlds, Volume 2*. For this, the two-octave set of "tuned bongos" and the electronic Clavioline were brought into play, as these are also a part of ScienSonic's vast and unmatched instrumentarium. Despite a pouring rain, and some technical difficulties which had to be overcome before the recording could proceed, everyone persevered and saw this project through. The result of this massive effort is some truly startling and unforgettable music, captured by Alderson with extraordinary clarity and sonic detail.

It is important to note that these sessions are NOT re-dos or recreations. None of the original music was duplicated. Rather, the idea was to assemble the sonic palette of the original recordings - the same instrumentation and distinctive sounds - and then create new and imaginative music... music that would honor the spirit of the original sessions, while also setting off into new and completely uncharted terrain. This was ScienSonic's most ambitious project to date, and the results are remarkable. From an audiophile standpoint, Alderson calls it "the best recording I have ever made." This is music that *takes* you somewhere... somewhere utterly unfamiliar, yet strangely inviting. Or as Sun Ra used to say, "somewhere there." It is music that could *only* have taken place at ScienSonic Laboratories, with these musicians, these sounds. And while it is unlike any other ScienSonic production to date, it is music that certainly lives up to the ScienSonic motto, "*Worlds of Tomorrow Through Sound.*"

Look for Volume One of this material to be issued on both CD and vinyl LP formats on Nov. 16, 2015... which happens to be the 50th anniversary of the recording of *Heliocentric Worlds, Volume 2*.

Please visit www.sciensonic.net to learn more about our previous releases with Julian Thayer, Marshall Allen, Roscoe Mitchell, Henry Grimes and more. Become a Laboratory Member!