

«This Is Mecolodics»

Liner Notes to the Universal Congress Of LP

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It's a new day and an unfamiliar word stands at the crossroads: mecolodics. Tracing the origins of this exciting approach to improvisation Joe Baiza recalls, "The first time I experienced mecolodics was when I heard my Aunt Lucy's boyfriend Sal play trumpet in the bar down the street from my parents' house. We lived in Wilmington and a lot of mariachi bands roamed back and forth between the bars and restaurants. Sal used to carry his horn, a silver pocket trumpet, with him and when these mariachi musicians showed up at the bar he'd try to jam with them. Sal listened mostly to jazz, so he ended up playing a sort of be-bop mariachi blend: fast, hard lines against the plaintive singing and mournful horns. This didn't always mesh and sometimes Sal had to drop his horn and grab the nearest beer bottle. For me, a twelve year-old kid, this was mecolodics: the sound of breaking glass over a screaming, angry mariachi band playing their instruments at full volume, singing wildly, throwing punches; and Sal, laughing, ducking, picking up his horn to defiantly blow a be-bop lick, then busting through the front door out into the street, only to run into another mariachi band and the whole mess starting all over again! I never knew what to expect."

The words of today's foremost mecolodician. Succinctly stated: you never know what to expect. Joe explains, "This is the very essence of spontaneous creation. We don't think in terms of harnessing this raging, pure energy. These impulses emanate from somewhere higher, something beyond ourselves. We only want to serve as a channel for these impulses and manifest them through the beauty of sound. Our place as mecolodicians is not to focus on *how* the sound is, on *what* the sound is, on *when* the sound is, but that the sound just *is*. The beauty of this genesis...like a child being born."

Joe has assembled a group of musicians united in the common goal of beauty, whatever form it may take. However, the road has not been easy for Joe in finding these like-minded pipers. "After Sal, I seldom encountered anyone, musicians or otherwise, who possessed that intuitive mecolodic sensitivity. For many years, I preferred to play with non-musicians, guys who couldn't play, in the 'conventional' sense, an instrument. I'd just hand them a guitar or harmonica, maybe just a stick and can, and say 'play, play, just let the meco flow.' I became so desperate once that I spend a whole summer on the San Pedro waterfront playing to the seagulls, foghorns and roving packs of vicious, barking dogs. I recorded some of this and one day, when I feel that people have reached a state of meco-consciousness, I may release the tapes."

Three of the musicians on this record have played with Joe for some time now: Steve Moss, tenor saxophone, Ralph Gorodetsky, electric bass and Jason Kahn, drums. They have all felt, at one time or another, the hard slap from a musical community impervious to change. Jason laments, "All the people I played with before Joe, especially the bass players, they'd be yelling at me 'stop turning the beat around, lay off a them cymbals, why you gotta be splashin' around back there like some kind a big, dumb fish,' and other such ridiculous nonsense." According to Ralph, "Every time I'd take the thumb out there'd be trouble. One time, I had a gig in Simi Valley, California and some guys in the audience didn't like my playing too much. After our set, they 'asked' me to step outside to have a discussion. They took my bass, smashed it and tried to hand me by my strap. After that incident I kept the thumb under wraps." Even Steve Moss, with his wonderfully rich tone and lyrical solos—especially burning on Ornette Coleman's "Law Years"—has felt the lash. "I used to play around town, sitting in

here, there and, you know, it'd be cool. I'd blow some blues choruses, follow the changes. But I kept hearing these deeper harmonies, sonorities at the edge of my consciousness, seeing colors outside the known spectrum. When I played what I heard in my head, when I started to break into the next level, I found many musicians saying 'Mossio, whatever you may be reaching for has certainly exceeded your grasp. Why don't you sit this one out.' "

Since the Universal Congress Of's inception, several other Los Angeles musicians have adopted the mecolodic stance. For this session Joe called on Guy Bennett, trombone (also a fine bass player), Chicago Jake Cohn, alto saxophone, and multi-reed wizard Lynn Johnston. According to Joe, "These musicians, these improvisers, take the meco and spread it thick and heavy. They are very dangerous, very formidable. In the studio, 'Happy Birthday' nearly became overwhelming. It was all Vitus could do to keep the tape rolling. We even recorded some vocals, possibly the first instance of mecolodic vocals, but, in the light of the intensity, the sheer physicality of the instrumental track, we decided to leave the vocals out. We don't want to be responsible for laying something on the public that they're not ready for. Playing with these prosperous musicians I feel like Sal, except instead of dodging bottles and chairs, I'm embroiled in a mecolodic cacophony of the most glorious proportions...those Wilmington nights rushing back across time, washing over me, rekindling in me the child's vision of wonder and faith in a chaotic, mad world where only mecolodics ring true across the sad void."

Now that Joe, his musicians and I have spoken, put this record on your stereo and let the music speak, let the meco take you. And don't be afraid to look back. Somewhere in each of our psyches, beyond memory, lying somewhere atavistic, untapped, is our own sense of mecolodics. We only need a spark to start the conflagration, to revolutionize our minds, our souls. Hear this music and burn.