

Reincarnated Egyptian  
sun gods – famous  
for jazz and dressing  
like jockeys down  
the disco

manifesto!

## Sun Ra Land

Jazz genius, space boy and leader of the Arkestra manoeuvres in the park

Sun Ra is modern music's original space boy. A composer, pianist, poet and philosopher, he claimed he was born on Saturn, named himself after an ancient Egyptian sun god, and insisted he was sent to Earth to try to save our planet.

To jazz and improvised music what George Clinton is to funk and Lee "Scratch" Perry is to reggae, Sun Ra was eccentric, experimental, colourful and comic. He led his avant-garde collective – the Arkestra – for nearly 40 years, inspiring a devotion in his musicians that led to many living communally with him in a house in Philadelphia, where the crowded sitting room served as a rehearsal space.

His music encompassed jazz, blues, swing, free improvisation, fusion, African rhythms and space-age electronics and he recorded more than 120 albums. His spectacular live shows featured ornate Egyptian robes and shiny spacesuits, as well as dancing, singing, chanting, rapping, black cabaret and joyous processions around the audience.

Sun Ra died in 1993 at the age of 79. Recently his music has been rediscovered and reappraised, and increasingly he has been acknowledged as influencing musicians from Parliament-Funkadelic to Pink Floyd, David Bowie, Earth, Wind and Fire and Public Enemy.

Many of his self-released albums have also become available again (newcomers and sceptics should start with *Jazz In Silhouette*) and an intriguing biography, *Space Is The Place*, by American critic John F Szwed, is soon to be published. Even arch conservative Radio 3 has wised up to music's original star trekker, this month broadcasting an in-depth, four-part tribute to the man and his music. **Philip Watson** Songs From Saturn is on BBC Radio 3 at 6pm on Saturdays until September 27; *Space Is The Place* is published by Payback Press at £12.99 on September 18.

