

Pharoah Sanders – Elevation (1973)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Elevation* 2. *Greeting to Saud (Brother McCoy Tyner)* [play](#) 3. *Ore-Se-Rere* 4. *The Gathering* 5. *Spiritual Blessing*

Personnel: Pharoah Sanders (vocals, flute, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone, shaker, percussion, bells); Calvin Hill (vocals, tamboura, bass guitar, tambora); Joe Bonner (vocals, wooden flute, cow horn, piano, harmonium, cowbells, percussion); Michael Carvin (vocals, drums, percussion); Lawrence Killian (vocals, congas, percussion, bells); John Blue (vocals, percussion); Sedatrius Brown (vocals); Thabo Michael Carvin (drums); Michael White (violin); Kenneth Nash, Jimmy Hopps (percussion).

Elevation, Pharoah Sanders' final album for Impulse!, is a mixed bag. Four of the five cuts were recorded live at the Ash Grove in Los Angeles in September of 1973, and the lone studio track, "Greeting to Saud (Brother McCoy Tyner)," was recorded in the same month at Wally Heider's studio. The live date is fairly cohesive, with beautiful modal piano work from Joe Bonner, Pharoah playing tenor and soprano as well as a myriad of percussion instruments and vocalizing in places, and a percussion and rhythm section that included Michael Carvin on drums, bassist Calvin Hill, and hand drummers John Blue and Lawrence Killian. The standout on the set is the opener. At 18 minutes, it's the longest thing here and gives the band a chance to stretch into African and Latin terrains. Sanders' long, loping, suspended lines create a kind of melodic head that is underscored by Bonner's hypnotically repetitive piano work, playing the same chord progression over and over again as he begins his solos (one on each horn). Somewhere near the five-minute mark, Pharoah enters into a primal wail and the whole thing becomes unhinged, moving into a deep blowing session of free improv. Honks, squeals, wails, and Bonner pounding the hell out of the piano erase any trace of what came before, and this goes on for four minutes before the theme restates itself and once more the magic begins. It's utterly compelling and engaging. "Saud" finds a host of percussionists (including Sanders) along with Hill on tamboura, Bonner, and violinist Michael White. It's a subtle and droning work, full of a constant hum. The other long track, "The Gathering," clocks in at almost 14 minutes, but instead of being a somber nocturnal work it's a lively South African-inspired work that nods to Dollar Brand for inspiration. A gorgeous, nearly carnival piece, it rolls and chugs and runs along on the steam created by Bonner's beautiful chord work. The chorus of vocals chanting in the

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foreground and background adds to the party feel, but once again it choogles right off the track into some rather angry and then spooky free improv, with a fine solo by Hill. This may not rate as highly as some of Sanders' other recordings for the label like Thembi or Karma, but there is plenty here for fans, and it is well worth the investigation and the purchase. ~ Thom Jurek

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