

## Brother Ah – Move Ever Onward (1975/2002)

Written by bluesever

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*A1 Nature's Children 6:14 A2 Transfiguration 9:46 A3 Enthusiasm 5:02 A4 Spirits In The Night 6:52 B1 Transcendental March (Creation Song) 3:36 B2 Boundless Rhythm 5:19 B3 Celestial Strings 8:39 B4 Sweet Illumination "Chile Woman" 9:33* Arranged By, Composed By, Conductor, Drums, Flute, French Horn, Sitar, Sounds [Nature Sounds] – Brother Ahh Bass – Eugene Cooper Clarinet, Tenor Saxophone, Shawm – Pat Patrick Congas, Drums – John Belcher Congas, Drums, Tabla – Mbutu Drums [African Drum] – Omowale Drums, Oboe – Steve Solder Drums, Performer [Kiti Kup] – Ras Karby Electric Piano, Piano – Olu Gong, Percussion, Shakuhachi, Performer [Space Beam] – Kufu Ptah Guitar – Ayida Tengemana Guitar, Percussion – Obowale Kora, Percussion – Dara Koto – Barbara Mc Cloud, Branice Inemugo Williams, Carolyn Davis, Elssi Atiba, Harold Lucious Panpipes [Pan Flute] – Lance Dozier Soloist – Kamau, Kassin, Khadijah, Kwesi Tambourine, Coordinator – Alfred Wade, Jr.+ Voice [Reciting Poem] – Dara, Ayida Tengemana Vocals - Aiisha, Kwesi Gilbert Northern

This isn't quite what one would expect from a man in Sun Ra's orbit. Quite frankly, this is mannered music, composed and arranged in side-long suites, sort of an African-tinged Porgy & Bess. The powerful voice of Aiisha kicks off each side with a sort of lyrical narration -- you know the sort: lots of images of cotton fields and hot baked streets, fairly typical for this sort of '60s ensemble. What isn't as typical is the instrumentation. Besides the expected African percussion, koto and other Asian instruments (including a sitar) are heard. One of the most affecting pieces might be "Celestial Strings," a duet of koto and kora backed with tumbling percussion. Like most of the album, the effect is subtly jarring and just different enough to be unique. ---Rob Ferrier, AllMusic Review

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In contrast to the more aggressive records in jazz's protest-album history—think Archie Shepp's *Fire Music* and Charlie Haden's *Liberation Music Orchestra*—are the lovey-dovey discs that more often than not offered Eastern-informed wisdom and always offered the missive “make love, not war.” Two lost LPs of that ilk by French hornist Brother Ah, aka Robert Northern, have recently been reissued on the Ikef label. (Ah is best known for appearing on John Coltrane's *Africa/Brass*, a handful of Sun Ra discs and sundry other avant-garde recordings of the '50s, '60s and '70s.)

*Move Ever Onward*, Ah's peaceful joint from 1975, rests his message of love on a bed of East-meets-West instrumentation. Between the swami-stained guitar duet in “Enthusiasm” and the pizzicato mystery of “Celestial Strings,” you can almost smell the incense burning. Making peace with the atrocities presented by vocalist Aiisha is a task for a master mediator, however. Though she can hit those elusive notes in between the notes, she lacks the charm of say, a June Tyson, and if it weren't for the mellowed and restrained saxophone solo by Pat Patrick that follows her wailings on “Transfiguration,” the track would be repeatedly subjected to my remote controlled wrath. Kwesi Gilbert Northern's smoothster crooning on “Spirits in the Night,” on the other hand, charms and creates a mood like a Philly-sound slow-jam: soulful tranquility. *Onward's* instrumentals continue to entrance 17 years after they were laid down, but the vocal tracks, with their fanciful encouragements of peace and love, have merely translated to kitsch in the 21st Century, bestowing *Onward* with alternate powers of inducing either nostalgia or nausea.

*Sound Awareness*, Ah's collaboration with Max Roach, fares much better from start to finish. The liners explain that the 22-minute lead track, “Beyond Yourself,” contains the sounds and visions in a man's mind as he's forced to decide to either give up drugs or become a monk. That's a tough and rather unreasonable choice I hope you'll never have to make, but on the chance you have to: take the vow of silence. That way you can still fire one up, strap on the cans and freak out to delayed percussion reminiscent of Ra's early reverb experiments, spectral wordless vocals by Barbara Grant and Ah's piercing “natural sounds” (read: the squawk of hell-spawned seagulls). Roach wrote the other track, “Love Piece,” and has his M'Boom ensemble hypnotize with layered rhythms and bell-tones before exploding at the climax. Earnest like a televangelist hard up for a new Mercedes, Roach preaches for brotherhood over the polyrhythms and is answered by a “90 voice” ensemble conducted by Brother Ah. Somewhere in the lo-fi mix is Howard Johnson, whose tuba is also featured on Archie Shepp's *Mama Too Tight*, an album that rates high on my list of favorite free-jazz experiences. ---Russell Carlson, [jazztimes.com](http://jazztimes.com)

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