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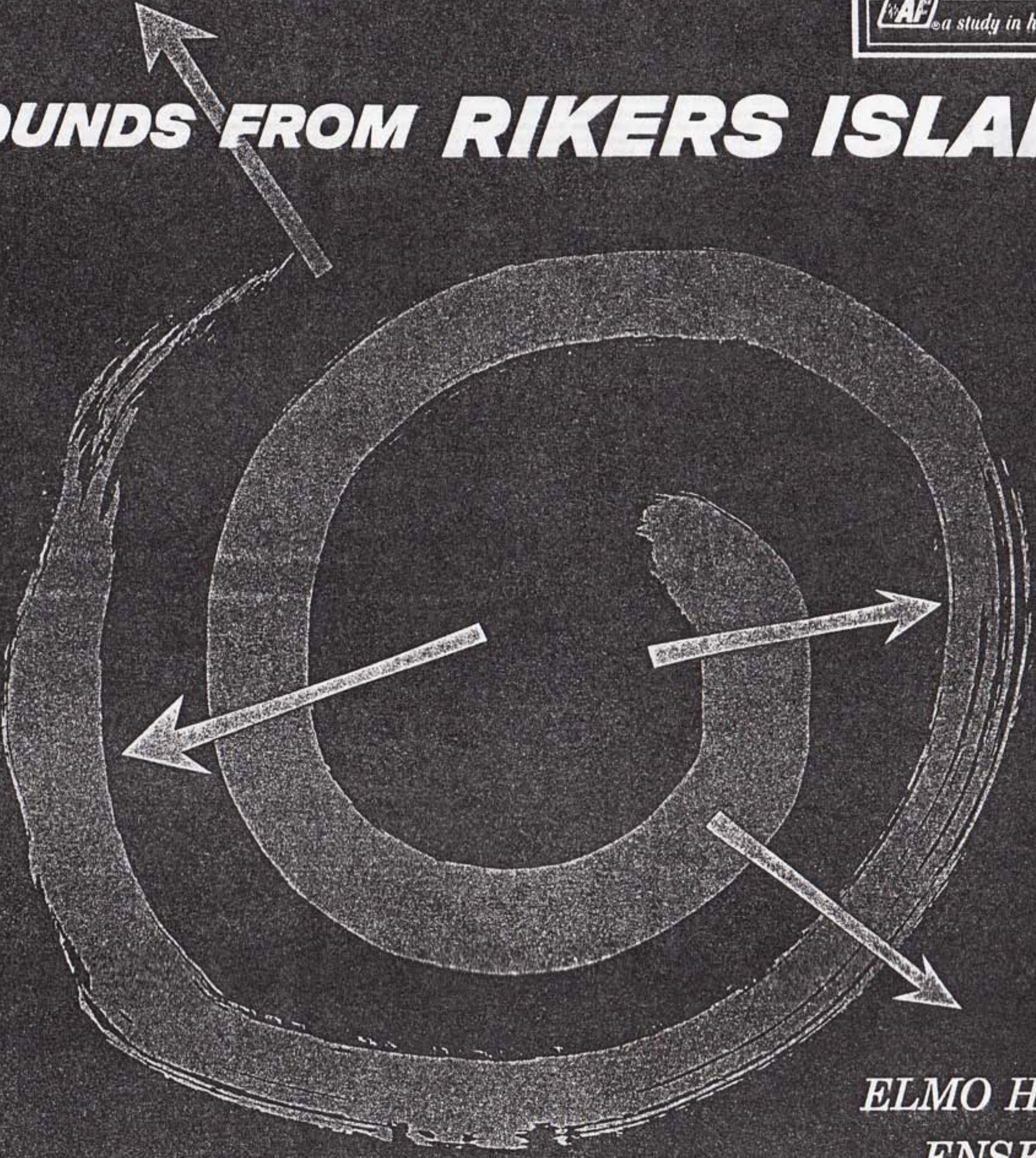
SOUNDS FROM RIKERS ISLAND



ELMO HOPE ENSEMBLE

A STUDY IN HIGH FIDELITY SOUND

CarryTheMessage.Com
Source: Danny M.

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SOUNDS FROM RIKERS ISLAND

A major catalyst in the production of this album is Walt Dickerson, the singularly inventive vibist. Dickerson does not appear as a musician, but he was instrumental in assembling the musicians and in helping Sid Frey direct the session. The album was first conceived during a conversation between Frey and Dickerson. They were talking about those musicians who had "problems"—a euphemism for those who have had to divide their energy and spirit between music and such exacerbating preoccupations as addiction or other conflicts with societal norms which have brought them for varying periods of time to Rikers Island and similar waystops.

It was Frey's contention that adding to the pressures of a jazz musician is the fact that "often, a musician's worth in this society is not judged by his ability as a musician, but by his ability to sell liquor." A further negative factor in some jazzmen's failure to retain an emotional center of gravity are the conditions under which they often work. "Some of them," said Frey, "become easier victims because of the places where they're forced to make a living—and they don't even make a good living. For some, the circle of frustration and anxiety is exceedingly hard to break."

It should be noted, of course, that most jazzmen do survive without yielding part of themselves to the shadows. Addiction, for example, is much less prevalent in jazz than it was during the 1940's, but it does still exist. And addiction outside of jazz continues to rise. Something vital is wrong with the way this society treats addicts and, for that matter, with the way it handles most of those who have broken its laws. As Hal Hollister, an expert on the problems from the inside, wrote in *Harper's*: "Measured strictly on performance, the American penal system is a scandalous flop as a correctional institution. This conclusion is unarguable because more than two-thirds the population of the country's 'correctional' institutions are repeaters—that is, inmates who have received the prescribed treatment, but were not corrected."

In any case, the "outsiders" among us have a very rough time getting back in. "I felt," says Walt Dickerson, "that the public should be made more aware of the existence of this kind of problem; and more specifically, the public should be aware of the kinds of pressures in jazz—including economics—which make it so difficult for some musicians to get back inside society." Dickerson himself has not been in trouble with the law, but he sees the problem of the outsider every day and every night.

"What I hope this album may help bring about," says Dickerson, "is a greater awareness among those people who can do something about the waste of talent now lurking in the shadows. Some program—or programs—should be set up so that musicians with proven ability can work with a minimum of economic pressure. At least some part of the music business can be reorganized and revitalized so that a man with something to say musically can have a chance to perform without that kind of persistent scuffling which drains his spirit."

As for addiction, Dickerson is a firm believer that some adaptation of the "British system" should be applied in this country. The essence of that British system, as explained by Dr. Jeffrey Bishop in his chapter in *The Drug Addict As Patient* (Nyswander) is that "morphine or heroin may properly be administered to addicts (a) under treatment by the gradual withdrawal method with a view to cure; (b) where it has been demonstrated, after a prolonged attempt at cure, that the use of the drug cannot safely be discontinued entirely on account of the severity of the withdrawal symptoms produced and (c) where it has been similarly demonstrated that the patient, while capable of leading a useful and relatively normal life when a certain minimum dose is regularly administered, becomes incapable of this when the drug is entirely discontinued."

In sum, in England, the drug addict *is* treated as a patient by a doctor. In this country, since the 1920's, the medical profession has abandoned the addict. Intimidated by law enforcement officials, the vast majority of doctors will not treat addicts. The addict, therefore, is left with no choice but the pusher, the underworld. And eventually, he is "treated" in prison, and that means no treatment at all. There is no *one* way to approach the problem of addiction. The "British system" can work for many. For others, Synanon, which requires that an addict be fully off drugs before self-rehabilitation is begun, can work. Psychotherapy can help some, and not help others. The one thing we *have* learned is that the thoroughly punitive approach will not work.

Finally, there are signs that experimental clinics will be set up—two such plans have already been announced in the state of New York—to discover if an addict can function as a useful member of society if he receives regular administrations of drugs under medical supervision. They would be provided at nominal prices rather than the voraciously inflated prices of the pushers. Even the *Wall Street Journal*, in a lead editorial on April 17, 1963, declared: We should begin considering how physicians, under careful rules, can be allowed to treat these sick people as they do others; and we can start searching for ways in which the tragic incurables can be put on sustaining doses that will keep them from desperate acts."

That day is coming, but it isn't here yet, and so lives and talent continue to be wasted. But some come out of it and have kept their talent. The leader, Elmo Hope, is a pianist and composer of consistent originality and—a word which particularly applies to his music—gracefulness. His parents came from the West Indies, and Hope was born in New York on June 27, 1923. His boyhood friend was Bud Powell, and they were reciprocal influences on each other. Except for basics, Hope is self-taught as a pianist and a composer. "I had no one to teach me," he points out, "but myself."

Through the years, Hope worked with a number of important jazzmen—Sonny Rollins and Clifford Brown, among them. In the late 1950's, Hope moved to California, and among the groups he worked with there were units led by Harold Land and Lionel Hampton. Since 1961, Hope has been back in New York. His style, both as pianist and composer, is characterized by lucidity, a resilient sense of order, and reflective lyricism.

Hope's originals in this set indicate some of his range as a writer. There is the gentle, expectant line and mood of *Kevin*, named for Elmo's youngest child, seven months old at the time of the recording. It's a waltz-type tune, but different in character from another fusion of waltz form and jazz, *Three Silver Quarters*. The latter, with its rhapsodic introduction and ruminative theme, has an intriguing opening in which Philly Joe Jones sounds like a modern Sonny Greer. The formidable Mr. Jones was the obvious inspiration for a third Hope original, *One for Joe*. "It's Latin in form," Elmo explains, "and its main aim was to give Philly complete freedom of speech."

Three other compositions by Hope are the airy, brightly lyrical *Ecstasy*; the unabashedly romantic *Monique*, and the brisk *Trippin'* whose title reflects the kind of gait Elmo had in mind when he wrote the tune. Of the standards, Elmo chose *Night in Tunisia* "so that everyone would have a chance to stretch out." *Groovin' High* is in large part a vehicle for the intriguingly idiomatic scat singing of Marcelle Daniels, a vocalist for whom Hope has great respect. "He's been around a long time," Elmo observes, "and he deserves a great deal more attention than he's received yet." The vocalist on *It Shouldn't Happen to a Dream* is the resonant, distinctive Earl Coleman who is one of the more persuasive interpreters of ballads. Coleman's list of credits is a distinguished one—including work with Jay McShann, Earl Hines, Gene Ammons and Charlie Parker.

Of the sidemen, Philly Joe Jones is characteristically precise, assured, imaginative, and unerringly tasteful. His propelling beat and range of cross-accents provide soloists with unusual stimulus to dig deeper into themselves, and he is also masterful in his use of dynamics. The tangy, assertive trumpeter is Lawrence Jackson who came to New York from Cleveland with Sonny Rollins some time ago and is now free-lancing in the city. John Gilmore, whose full sound and surgingly logical conception are particularly evident in *Three Silver Quarters* and *Monique*—as well as in his passionate solo on *Night in Tunisia*—has recorded with Freddie Hubbard and is considered by musicians as one of the more important of the newer tenor saxophonists.

Hope points out this album is Freddie Douglas' "first chance to get a real hearing." The alto saxophonist, who also plays soprano sax, was born in New York and was active during the early years of modern jazz, having worked with Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, and Hope. Bassist Ronald Boykins is from Chicago, where he played with Sun Ra. In New York for the past two years, Boykins is still playing with Sun Ra, who also moved here, as well as occasionally with Walt Dickerson. His time is dependable, his tone impressive, and his ideas are thoughtfully and individually structured.

When word about this date began to spread, there was unusual interest in the session to the extent that the studio was soon crowded. "I've never had a date," Sid Frey recalls, "to which so many musicians tried to gain entrance. At one point, there were about twenty people in the control room." The bond uniting those on the date and the visitors was the knowledge all had of how it feels to try to exist in the shadows. One of the visitors present, in fact, distilled the dilemma of those who are trying to break out of the circle of despair. An addict, he stayed "cool," as he puts it, for seven years—until 1961. Now he's back on the habit and is desperate to stop.

"All the time I was off," he says, "I worked hard. Everybody can tell you I worked hard. But jobs were hard to get and harder to keep. Some of the guys I worked for even seemed disappointed that I didn't goof. Yet I stayed straight. But there were so many disappointments and so much scuffling and personal problems besides. So I got my problem again. I'm going to try to kick again. It might be too late. I might have to pay more dues. But I *know* I can't get back to where I ought to be if I don't stop entirely. Some guys wear the stuff well. At least, they can function while they're on. Me, the minute I take the first taste, my troubles start. And with all the other tensions going on, I know I'm going to fall apart if I don't get off. Music is the most important thing in life to me, and yet I've been goofing that life away for nothing.

"These days," he continued, "I'm out in the street with no crib. And there's a new breed using now. I sit in one of those basement apartments and I see guys around me who don't even have a dream, man. They're real bitter people. I don't want to get like that. But where do I go? I need some analysis. I need something to help me straighten out. But with what money? And if I stay with the habit, sooner or later I'll get busted. And then, I could get put away for a long time. Now what sense does that make? Putting a man away when, if you tried to help him, he could still create. He could still be a credit to himself and everyone else. The only crime I commit, man, is reaching for the bag. And when I want to stop that, where do I turn? And you can see, even with all this pressure, I've got something going. I've got my own thing musically."

The addict in question is right. He does have talent, but whether he'll be able to realize that talent to its fullest is doubtful—the way we treat the outsiders now. And that again is one of the reasons for this album. Its intent is to call attention to the fact that men's lives need not be wasted. And many more can be rescued if, for one thing, this country were to start treating the addict as a patient and not automatically as a criminal.

—Nat Hentoff

Side 1

1. **ONE FOR JOE (Hope-Frey) Matador Music, BMI 4:32**
2. **ECSTASY (Hope-Frey) Matador Music, BMI 3:12**
3. **THREE SILVER QUARTERS (Hope-Frey) Matador Music, BMI 4:40**
4. **A NIGHT IN TUNISIA (Paparelli-Gillespie) Leeds Music, ASCAP 5:59**

Side 2

1. **TRIPPIN' (Hope-Frey) Matador Music, BMI 3:18**
2. **IT SHOULDN'T HAPPEN TO A DREAM (George-Ellington-Hodges) United Music, ASCAP 4:10**
3. **KEVIN (Hope-Frey) Matador Music, BMI 4:13**
4. **MONIQUE (Hope-Frey) Matador Music, BMI 3:00**
5. **GROOVIN' HIGH (Gillespie) Leeds Music, ASCAP 3:00**

TECHNICAL DATA (RIAA)

TOTAL FREQUENCY RANGE RECORDING

This recording was made on an Ampex Tape Recorder Model 350 with Telefunken, RCA, and Electrovoice microphones. The Masters were cut on an Automatic Scully Record Lathe with a Westrex Cutting Head.

Mastering was done with maximum stylus velocity consistent with minimum distortion realizing the ultimate in signal to noise ratio.

While the total frequency range of 16 CPS to 25,000 CPS on this record may not be within the range of ordinary human hearing, nevertheless inspection with a microscope will show the etchings of the upper dynamic frequencies.

However, it is the opinion of the manufacturer that if these frequencies were omitted from this record a certain warmth of tone that is felt and sensed rather than heard would be lost. For this reason and to achieve the ultimate in our "studies in HIGH FIDELITY sound" we have gone to these extreme electronic lengths.

Although any 33⅓ RPM record playing equipment may be used in playing this recording, it is recommended that playback equipment of extreme wide range and fidelity be used so that the recordings may be enjoyed to their utmost.

Low Frequency Limit	**16 CPS**
High Frequency Limit	**25,000 CPS**
Crossover	**500 CPS**
Rolloff	**13.75 DB at 10KC**

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