

When Gunther Schuller became the president of the New England Conservatory in 1969, he invited Russell to return to the U.S. and teach the Concept there, which Russell did. He continued to refine it, as well as tour with his own big bands. He also continued to compose: “The African Game” was issued on a revitalized Blue Note Records label, and garnered some the best reviews Russell had ever had. This writer met him briefly at an International Association of Jazz Educators convention in 2004, where he autographed the “definitive” edition of *The Lydian Concept* for me, a volume I treasure.

Heining’s first edition told Russell’s story in detail for the first time, and his update is enhanced by further interviews and coverage of Russell’s later years. It includes an interesting chapter on the Concept where he writes of it as a tool for musicians, a personal psychology and philosophy, various performers’ relationship to it in their own playing and writing, and also discusses the negative reactions of some musicians to Russell’s writings and theories. As it is the final chapter in the book, it makes a good summing-up of this important composer.

Heining has updated what was an important book, and has made it invaluable for anyone studying the jazz of the post-1960 period. *Reviewed by Jeffrey Sultanof*

Holy Ghost: The Life and Death of Free Jazz Pioneer Albert Ayler.

By Richard Koloda. UK: Jawbone Press, 2022. 302 pp., with extensive bibliography, ISBN: 978-1911036-93-7. Paperback \$24.95

Tenor saxophonist Albert Ayler (1936–1970) was an enigma: a genius and innovator to some, a charlatan and mediocre musician to others. But his music was a unique synthesis of all that had evolved in black jazz since World War II. Unusually, his sound and style were augmented by black gospel and spirituals that butted heads against marching bands and free jazz rhythmic impulses.

Born in Cleveland, Ayler grew up in a close-knit family with a house full of music. His father was an amateur saxophonist who played in a local band of some repute, but familial obligations prohibited any further development. As a child, Albert showed an interest in the saxophone which his father fostered. The same happened with his brother Donald and the trumpet.

Albert developed his abilities in the early to mid-1950s, first playing locally, and eventually going on the road with blues artist Little Walter and R&B/pop singer Lloyd Price. This was invaluable experience. Eventually he enlisted in the army (1959–1961) and found himself in Europe. He was already developing his distinctive sound: a roaring tenor saxophone bray filled with power and raw emotion. But listening deeply one could hear a melodic base at its core. It divided listeners as it was developing in America. In Europe, the reception was also mixed, but Scandinavia seemed receptive. His first trio recordings were done in Stockholm in 1962 with a Scandinavian rhythm section who gamely try to keep up with him.

When he got back to the U.S., he based himself in New York City. He quickly turned out two classic albums. *Spirits* (1964) came first, released by the Danish Debut label (and not released by a U.S. label until 1975). Debut sat on a recording of spirituals done at the same session that was not released until 1981. Then came his all-time classic, *Spiritual Unity* (released in 1965 by the U.S. ESP label) a trio recording with Ayler revealed in all his glory.

By 1966 he was at a career highpoint. He'd been signed to Impulse. He added his brother Donald on trumpet, alto saxophonist Charles Tyler (another Clevelander), and Dutch violinist Michel Samson to his group. By this point Ayler's music had evolved into a mixture of free jazz, folkish themes, and rhythms that incorporated marching band into the free jazz. It was a unique (and, to my ears, quite wonderful) blend, to be sure. It was highly regarded by some fellow musicians. When Coltrane died in 1967, he requested the Ayler (and Ornette Coleman) play at his funeral service.

But shortly after, Ayler stumbled. His last three albums for the Impulse label began mixing in rock rhythms that tended to sound forced with vocals and lyrics by his then partner, Mary Maria (Parks) that are lightweight at best. Those albums were not much appreciated when released and time has not been particularly kind to them. To me they still sound floundering and uncomfortable. Ayler had one last hurrah in 1970 as a featured artist at the Fondation Maeght in St. Paul de Vence, France. It seemed to signal a turn back to his free-jazz style, and for the most part, the music, although not as startling or accomplished, was a step forward from those that had preceded it.

Once he got back to the U.S, the pressures began piling up on him. The Impulse label dropped him, and many familial issues came to a head. After he was dismissed from the group, his brother Donald was committed to an institution and his mother blamed Albert for his instability. Allowing the guidance of his girlfriend Mary Maria (Parks) to influence his music watered down much of the passion and energy from it. A general malaise seemed to surround Ayler as things began to spiral downward, leading to his eventual suicide in November, 1970. He was missing for 20 days before his body was found floating in the East River, a presumed suicide.

This is a long and complex story of one of the more enigmatic figures in jazz. Richard Koloda tells it with both a sympathetic eye and a knowledgeable sheen. It is an extremely well-researched book, citing numerous written sources but doing his own research and interviews as well. He had contact with brother Donald toward the end of his life (he died in 2007) and has some well-chosen passages that tell the situation from Donald's perspective. Koloda also details Albert's last days and their subsequent aftermath with a sympathetic but unsentimental eye. He clearly admires Ayler but never tarnishes the text with over-romantic, sentimental prose and clearly understands the saxophonist's shortcomings.

Holy Ghost is a biography its subject clearly deserves. It tends to clear up a lot of the muddled, apocryphal rumors that circulated around the musician throughout his career with thorough coverage of his last days. This biography gives Ayler his just due by not glossing over the unpleasant parts. And it might even help in reviving the music of this thoroughly misunderstood jazz giant. *Reviewed by Robert Iannapallo*

The Hag: The Life, Times and Music of Merle Haggard. By Marc Eliot. New York: Hachette Books, 2022. xvi, 445 pp. ISBN 978-0-306-923321-0 (hardcover), 978-0-306-92319-7 (ebook). \$30

The Running Kind: Listening to Merle Haggard. By David Cantwell. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2022. 326 pp. Hardcover, ISBN 978-1-4773-2236--9. PDF file, ISBN 978-1-4773-2568-1. EPub, ISBN 978-1-4773-2569-8. \$29.95

From 1961 until his death in 2016, country music legend Merle Haggard (1937–2016) enjoyed a stellar career in country music. He had thirty-eight number 1 hits on *Billboard* magazine's Country singles charts from 1966 through 1988. He released sixty-six studio