

COPERNICUS

debut LP

Copernicus — *Nothing Exists* (Ski Records, P.O. Box 150, Brooklyn, NY 11217)

This is one of those records that hits you upside the head—like, really unexpected. I had never heard of this guy, and when I did hear him, it was something I would've never expected. Dig the front cover first: a middle-aged hippie type with glasses getting a light for his reeler from someone in the audience. Then turn it over and dig the personnel of the Copernicus Orchestra: 14 strong, with keyboards, guitars, various percussion instruments, violin, trombone, marimba, flute, etc. What gives? Take the disc out of the sleeve and put it on the turntable.

The first side starts out like some cosmic-conscious Barry White seductively promising, "I won't hurt you, I won't hurt you," but it's a deceptive beginning. The following cut, "Blood," expands the near-muzak arrangement of the opener into a slick, dense, jazz-style ensemble sound, kinda like Sun Ra and the Arkestra tightened up considerably. The vocals start to sound a bit like John Cale at his most possessed, and the poetry lyrics are odd: "It's ignorance that makes all the static/Like a woman running on a baseball field." Yeah! The music builds to a mild frenzy, with huge drum sounds echoing through the studio, and a female voice finally breaks through, waxing angelic to end it. And, as you're asking yourself what will they do next, Copernicus answers, "Let the musicians declare war!" On "I Know What I Think" everything finally falls apart/together perfectly. It's sort of, uh . . . tribal? Sure, this bunch hails from NYC, the city of Fugs—the city of Godz! "Quasimodo" ends the first side, chugging along full of angst, mumbled French (I think)—machine-like and ugly, as opposed to merely noisy.

The second side starts a bit slow with the lengthy, monotonous, but ultimately cool "Let Me Rest." The rest of the side deals with nuclear concerns. "Nagasaki" sounds like an inspired Hawkwind/Can jam/mutation, an ominous, swirling electronic groove. It ends with a note of warning: "Death does not exist/Birth does not exist/Life does not exist/Copernicus does not exist/The Earth does not exist/Max's Kansas City does not exist." Whew! And, finally, "Atomic Nevermore" talks of a post-nuclear utopian age: "freed of all illusion . . . the heaven that is spontaneous life . . . no pasts, no future . . . loose and smiling and free."



So what's the deal, huh? I'm not sure, but it sounds pretty sincere and really different, even to these cynical ears. The original Copernicus dug that there was a circular order to the solar system way back in the 14th Century. But some people still live in their own private worlds—square worlds that they believe to be the centers of the universe. This modern day Copernicus—self-styled "rock poet and philosophical rebel," certainly an astronomical bard—is trying to straighten the situation. Yeah, I dig this—way cool. And if you're the type for whom Armand Schaubroeck's *Ratfucker* or Can's *Ege Bamyasi* was a major musical event, then this is one for you too.

2nd platter

VICTIM OF THE SKY (same address)

There's no way the second Copernicus LP could hit me as hard as the first one did—I was prepared this time. And it's also a bit more subdued than the first—in some ways. But this disc certainly has many, many rewards for those willing to go inside and dig. Dig? Dug.

This second Copernicus offering begins with the man stating right up front what's what: he has no race, no species, no country, no planet—nothing. Despite the weird Darwinian stuff that pops up throughout, he seems to see himself as somehow outside of it all. Like, as he states on a later cut, "Copernicus does not exist—therefore he could never descend!" Wild!

The next cut, "The Wanderer" (no, not the Dion tune), is a strange, sort of MDR cut, followed quickly by the lyrical babble of "Victim of the Night." Both are overshadowed by "White from Black," a spooky, expansive jam with more biological theorizing: "There was once a time when all humans were black!" But, you know, the snow of the northern lands turned their skins white. And I guess we all have "soul," as they used to say.

Then there's "Not Him Again," more spontaneous tongue (and musical) action. And, this time at least, let's think in terms of pre- and post-Babel—like intuitive (telepathic?) and formal language. The jam is hysterical, self-referential, big in a percussive way, weird: "I've left my insecthood . . . my fishhood . . . my algaehood." Evolving into—unto *what?* Pretty mind boggling stuff.

The side closes with a "normal," sort of reggae ditty, "Desperate," from guitarist Larry Kirwan that is saved from the marginal ozone by final comments from the man in charge. "Eat your guts!" is the Copernican message here.

Side two starts slow with an almost gentle anti-capitalist comment called "In Terms of Money," but then revs up with "From Bacteria." Yeah, we are all descended from the stuff (except Copernicus, as noted earlier), and he names names: Reagan, Springsteen, Jesus, Buddah, etc.

Except for a brief reprise of "Victim of the Sky," the platter winds up with a nine-minute monologue by Copernicus, obviously role playing. "The Lament of Joe Apples" speaks with the voice of a bitter, middle-aged, working man who has seen too much shit and is not willing to take any more. This is just a wild guess, but as personal as this sounds, it makes me think that maybe "Joe Apples" is Copernicus's own father, at least someone close—or possibly Copernicus himself, in an earlier self-incarnation? Anyway, it hits pretty hard, the gruff, unsophisticated bitching over the subdued blips and bubbling of the Copernicus ensemble. Impressive.

What else can I say? Uh, once again, this is one of the most interesting, vital, strange releases of the year. I would recommend that you listen.