The 'disappearance' of which the New York performer-poet Copernicus speaks is that of The Universe itself. His conceptual concerns are not with the everyday. He is not penning couplets about the changing fortunes of human existence, other than on the grandest (or lowliest) scale. He speaks of subatomic matter, and refuses to bear any glad tidings.

It all happened in Hoboken, New Jersey, on November 2, 2008, when Copernicus gathered together a large ensemble of improvising musicians and booked a day-long session dedicated to existential immersion (or possibly non-existential immersion). Many of these are artists that he’s worked with for more than two decades, all of them attuned to the willing abandonment of pre-meditation, well-versed in the dangers of deliberate free-fall. The longtime musical director of Copernicus’ assemblage is the Irish keyboardist and composer Pierce Turner, long resident in New York City. His fellow countryman, Black 47 leader Larry Kirwan is one of the album’s four guitarists, along with Mike Fazio, César Aragundi and Bob Hoffnar. Other musicians appearing on the album are: Raimundo Penaforte (violin, acoustic guitar, cavaquinho, percussion, vocals); Cesar Aragundi (electric & acoustic guitar); Fred Parcells (trombone); Rob Thomas (violin); Matty Fillou (sax), Marvin Wright (electric bass guitar and additional electric guitar), George Rush (tuba, acoustic and electric bass), Thomas Hamlin (drums & percussion) and Mark Brotter (drums & percussion).

Is Copernicus celebrating The Universe, or observing its collapse? This ageless sage orates like a windswept preacher who has just witnessed visions of the apocalypse. Turner is rolling out swathes of Gothic Hammond organ, leading the ensemble in their surging accumulations. A bassline walk begins, a slide guitar floats, a trombone starts up its funereal sway. Copernicus declares, and almost rants. He’s taking things (matter) to the precipice, as he deals with the nature of subatomic particles. A chorus of voices from the band fill the edges around the congregation’s void. Does Copernicus herald doom or salvation? A synthesizer whine melds with acoustic guitar traceries, as the music moves like slow-scudding clouds. Copernicus mocks humanity, almost exultant as he repeatedly screams, "Nothing exists!" with his intensity feeding back and forth between himself and the players. The band marches down to New Orleans, Copernicus angry, desperate, defiant, triumphant and forlorn, rising out of a free jazz maelstrom as he booms, "The revolution is here!...The revolution that does not exist!"
Perhaps the most fitting way to describe Copernicus is as a performance poet. Even though he (originally named Joseph Smalkowski) plays keyboards, Copernicus refuses to be categorised as a musician. Despite often having inhabited the alternative New York rock’n’roll scene, his music also exudes strong elements of jazz, classical and the avant garde. Even though Copernicus’ preferred recording strategy is that of improvisation, his epic pieces tend to revolve around themes, riffs and repeated clusters, moving along a clearly linear pathway.

The booming delivery and abstract texts evoke the spirit of classic beat generation poetry, but the Copernicus stance goes back even further to the theatrical confrontations of the Dada movement. He’s always preferred the improvisatory approach, even though each poem’s grist might be prepared in advance, their rhythms and content might be disassembled in the moment.

Copernicus has always been fiercely independent, since he first started recording in this manner, back at the dawn of the 1980s. He organizes the recording sessions, sculpts the assembled band, oversees the album artwork and releases each disc on his own Nevermore, Inc. label. 1985 brought Nothing Exists, which emphatically laid out the themes of his subsequent work. A burst of creativity led to the swift succession of Victim Of The Sky (1987), Deeper (1989) and Null (1990). Often, Copernicus would perform with large-scale ensembles, but in 1991 he initiated the practice of giving completely solo performances, revealing his declamations in a stripped, confrontational space. He views himself as a conduit for abstract ideas and philosophical notions. Copernicus decided that his particular marriage of music and narrative was the best way to communicate his thoughts and concepts to a receptive audience.

He released No Borderline in 1993, but there was to be a longer gap before 2001’s Immediate Eternity which moved in a completely different direction as its creator was spending increasing amounts of time in Ecuador, where the Spanish version of the album La Eternidad Inmediata was released the same year. The album is followed by 2005 releases of Immediate Eternity II, Die Sofortige Ewigkeit II (in German), L’Eternite Immediate II (in French) and La eternidad inmediata II (in Spanish). Copernicus was evolving after having spent three years penning his book, also called Immediate Eternity. He linked up with Los Nomadas from Guayaquil, the country’s biggest city, and his music moved temporarily more towards the zone of jazz-rock fusion. Now, with disappearance, Copernicus has made a return to the old established methods, refining them into what is probably his key distillation of an ongoing obsession with the freedom and beauty of nothingness.

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