

John Finneran
Goin' Home
February 27 - April 7, 2013

A year ago I started listening to an album called Goin' Home. The band-leader was a saxophone player named Albert Ayler. I had heard of him before I heard him play, but I didn't have any reference for his playing other than that it was free jazz, mostly, and lost in a way-out place where there's lots of music that I don't understand or know very much about. When I heard him for the first time it was a number of years ago, and I was working on a boat. I brought his most well known record, Spiritual Unity, to work and we played it, among the other things we played. I tried to like it, although I honestly didn't all that much aside from the sound of his instrument, what I suppose you'd called the timbre, which I found beautiful. And it was terrible music to work to, nothing at all to hammer a nail to.

A few years later I was back in New York again, where I'm from, and listening to a different Ayler record and walking back and forth across the Williamsburg Bridge, to and from my studio. I started to relate to it then. I was listening to Goin' Home, a recording of standards. Besides the title track there was Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, and Old Man River, songs that I'd heard. I'd sung them in school choir when I was a kid, my Grandma sings Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen, and Ayler played that too. I liked listening to this on my walk, bookending my workday. I read about it where I could. I thought Ayler had recorded these songs in Copenhagen though it turned out that was a different record of standards. Goin' Home was recorded in New York. So I was mistaken, but already imagining Ayler as a young guy, in Europe, trying to play these American standards. I thought he might be lonely there, because I had been there when I was younger to do a show and I found it lonely, parts of it. Maybe he had friends where he was and it was different for him, and it was more like an adventure. I think that looking at your ideas in a place where they didn't come from can make you think more clearly of home, and that can be lonely. And in any case Ayler was from Cleveland, so when he got to New York he wasn't home either, but he was back in the states where the melodies he played came from, and that makes a difference. The last thing I read was that he had been found dead in the East River when he was about 33, which I found incredibly sad. He was a really beautiful player and I still find his recordings very moving.

Oftentimes when I work I'm humming or hearing something that helps me remember what I'm doing. I don't try and hold on to it too tight. I once read that Francis Picabia signed his manifesto: "Francis Picabia, who knows nothing, nothing, nothing." He might as well have. And I can sympathize. I never feel like I know anything. I only hear it sometimes or see it.

JPF, New York, 2013