

\*\*\*For immediate release\*\*\*  
for interviews, images, sound samples or other information contact:  
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## The ESP Story

ESP-Disk', the company that was at the heart of the sixties avant garde jazz movement and documented radical bands from the concurrent underground folk and rock scenes, with a philosophy proclaimed in the dictum printed on each release that "The artists alone decide what you hear on the ESP Disk'", proudly celebrates the 45th Anniversary of the corporate genesis that changed the way records were produced.

ESP's founder, Bernard Stollman, who was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey on July 19, 1929 and raised in Plattsburgh, New York, migrated to New York City to attend Columbia University at the time the institution was a hotbed of expanding social consciousness, eventually earning a degree in law. After graduation, the idealistic young attorney got his first real exposure to the world of jazz working as an unpaid intern for the law firm that handled the estates of Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker. He recalls that soon afterwards, "I started helping black musicians involved with improvisational music—the late Cal Massey, Randy Weston—I became acquainted with that community very gradually."

The word soon got out among the "most desperate of the musicians" that Stollman would help them with their problems if he could, leading to eventual relationships with Ornette and Cecil Taylor. He also did some legal work for Moses Asch of Folkways, which led to a burgeoning knowledge of the workings of the record business. Combining this curiosity with his committed interest in the internationally recognized effort at establishing a universal language, he released his newly formed label's first LP, *Ni Kantu en Esperanto*, (*Let's All Sing in Esperanto*), in 1963.

Later that year he experienced the musical epiphany that would lead to the expansion of the label into the iconoclastic musical territory for which it would become (in)famous. At the suggestion of a friend, Stollman traveled uptown to the club Baby Grand in Harlem to hear an at-the-time virtually unknown player. "This small man came through the audience ... jumped up on the stage with this huge saxophone, and he started to play without any fanfare or introduction. Albert Ayler blew the saxophone for twenty or thirty minutes nonstop and when he finished, covered with sweat, he came down from the stage. I went over to him and introduced myself and 'I said I'm starting a record label and I want you to be my first artist.' I made the commitment, I set things in motion. I had a cause, as this man was incredible. I was blown away -- I'd never heard anything like it."

Ayler's intensely powerful "Spiritual Unity" was released in 1964 and the post Coltrane world of jazz improvisation was rocked to its core. In the years that followed the label released several more Ayler records, while recording a roster that also included similarly revolutionary innovators, including Paul Bley, Ornette Coleman, Milford Graves, Sunny Murray, Sun Ra and Pharoah Sanders, as well as a coterie of saxophonists following in Ayler's footsteps - Gato Barbieri, Marion Brown, Frank Wright, Noah Howard, Guiseppe

Logan, Charles Tyler, Frank Lowe and Joseph Jarman. Many of these players were propelled to international fame and major label success as a result of their initial ESP Disk outings. "We were the farm team," Stollman says modestly.

At the same time the label ventured into documenting the work of some of the more outrageous artists that were expanding the boundaries of rock and folk music on the rapidly changing downtown music scene. "Originality was the only criterion," Stollman contends. "Some of the most original, beautiful and artistic music comes from free improvisation, but it's not the only thing." Beginning with the Fugs, who wanted to be identified with this whole ESP phenomenon, the label picked up on a faction of bands fueled by antiwar politics and drug induced consciousness expansion. Again, groups like Pearls Before Swine and the Holy Modal Rounders went on to larger label popularity as a result of their ESP debuts. Even more eclectic releases by William Burroughs and Timothy Leary proved the labels connectedness to the pulse of the changing times.

Despite the number of artistic successes on the label and its historical relevance, ESP was essentially a business debacle and after several years of an intense presence ESP Disk slipped away into essentially bankrupt inactivity during the seventies. Most of the label's music effectively disappeared, with only a small portion of the catalogue available through what proved to be less than rewarding foreign licensing agreements. A disillusioned Stollman left the record business and took a job as a government lawyer, putting in his time until his retirement on his 62nd birthday in 1991.

Coincidentally, five months later the German record company ZYX proposed to license ESP, wanting to put out all 115 titles on CD. Stollman was back in the record business. "We did a monumental job of getting ready and spent all of our money on materials getting prepared for them and they did a great job," Stollman remembers. "They put them all out and distributed them all over the world. They were a dance label and they had global distribution. That was a help to us." Successive agreements with CALIBRE in Holland and Abraxas in Italy sustained the company into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In 2005, ESP the company resumed activities in the U.S. with reissues of albums by Ayler, Sun Ra, Holy Modal Rounders, Pearls Before Swine and Frank Wright and newly released live recordings by Don Cherry, Bud Powell and Lester Young and exhaustively researched Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker box sets produced by staffer Michael Anderson. "I would like to think that today we have risen like a Phoenix from the ashes," Stollman says proudly. "I have a small first-rate staff now and I have collaborators that I work with who are extraordinarily knowledgeable and helpful. In that sense, things have changed enormously—we are no longer flying blind. Things are happening."

The label has also undertaken the production of contemporary artists playing music that can best be described, in the words of Duke Ellington, as "beyond category." Stollman says his philosophy for choosing new artists remains the same as it was back in the sixties, which is "do you have something to say?" The label will celebrate this auspicious landmark, with seven hours of live music on Sunday, November 8, 2009 at the Bowery Poetry Club. All proceeds from the event will be donated to the Jazz Foundation of America.

## **45 years of ESP**

***A benefit concert for the Jazz Foundation in celebration of the artists & music of  
ESP-Disk'***

**November 8th, 2009**

**2 - 9:30pm**

**@ The Bowery Poetry Club**

308 Bowery Street  
(Between Houston and Bleecker)  
F train to 2nd Ave, 6 to Bleecker  
212-614-0505

Scheduled performers include:

**Guiseppe Logan** (ESP [1007](#), [1013](#), [1055](#))  
**Sonny Simmons** (ESP [1030](#), [1043](#), [4012](#))  
**Alan Sondheim** (ESP [1048](#), [1082](#))  
**Paul Thornton** (ESP [1037](#), [1047](#), [1077](#), [2017](#), [3008](#), [3019](#))  
**Randy Burns** (ESP [1039](#), [1089](#), [2007](#))  
**Kali Fasteau** (ESP [3018](#))  
**Warren Smith** (ESP [1054](#), [1069](#))  
**Joe Morris** (ESP [4052](#), [4056](#))  
**Bruce Eisenbeil's Totem**> (ESP [4046](#))  
+ many more ESP artists & special guests to be announced

\$20-100 sliding scale

***100% of door proceeds go directly to the Jazz Foundation of America***

A huge selection of ESP titles will be available on site, along with hundreds of new & used vinyl & CDs selections. ***All profits from CD & record sales for the afternoon go directly to performing artists!***

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