

REMEMBER . . .

Born Louis Thomas Hardin in 1916 in Marysville, Kansas, Moondog is without any doubt one of the most peculiar musical personalities of the twentieth century. An unknown legend and a blind visionary, he nurtured all his life long a taste for mirrors and paradoxes. A warrior of the Great North amid the white-collar workers of Manhattan, and one of the first Dharma Bums, he created a highly original universe made up of a thousand different compositions. The luxuriance of his work results from his insatiable curiosity and endless thirst for discovery and experimentation, which often led him to mix different musical styles. Breaking down borders between musical genres and careless about aesthetic tags, he embodies a link between cultures and epochs, hence his nickname “The Bridge.” Therefore, when his interest in the very demanding and rigorous classical repertoire met his passion for Indian music, based on the loose and vital heart pulsations, he began to work with unusual uneven rhythms that would very soon take a central place in his music, becoming as personal as a fingerprint. Oriental modes coupled with Native American or Caribbean rhythms are regularly found in Moondog’s music, tied together by an academic writing, most often in the form of fugues and canons, with a strong emphasis on counterpoint. Likewise, it is not unusual to find classical harmony associated with jazz phrasing in his compositions, resulting in a unique body of work that is immediately recognizable after the five beats of the first bar. What was true in the 1950s remains true to this day, long after Moondog’s death.

Raised by his mother, an organ teacher, and his father, a priest fond of ragtime and military marches, young Louis became interested in music very early on. His first life-changing experience occurred in the early 1920s, while visiting an Indian reservation his father was sent to evangelize. There, the venerable Yellow Calf, chief of the Arapaho tribe, sat the young boy on his lap and made him beat the rhythm of the sun dance on a big drum made from buffalo skin. One of the most sacred rites of the Plains Indians turned out to be an initiatory encounter for Louis, and formed the very basis of his fascination for rhythm, and for tribal pulsations in particular. On Independence Day, July 4, 1932, the sixteen-year-old boy, while on one of his frequent solitary walks along the railroad lines, picked up a shiny object on the ground. What proved to be a blasting cap exploded in his face with a glaring flash, rendering him completely and irremediably blind. His older sister then proceeded to read to him regularly, and at the very end of his teenage years, he was so overwhelmed by her reading of Jessie Fothergill’s *The First Violin* that he decided to become a composer. But not just any composer, the best composer of the century!

After his accident and the separation of his parents, young Louis fell into a depression, from which he was saved by his love of music. His blindness even got him admitted to several schools where he received an academic training. He now played keyboards, drums, violin and viola, and also sang bass in a choir. Very quickly, his teachers noticed his abilities, which earned him a scholarship and the chance to study in Memphis. Alas, his new professor only taught modern music and disregarded the classical European music the apprentice composer was so fascinated by. Louis then left Memphis for New York with only 60 dollars in hand, considering this the “most romantic” thing to do.

He made a living from odd jobs for a while, posing as a model for art schools, while printing and selling his poetry. He also designed his own clothes from fabric, and sported one of his strange homemade outfits the first time he attended a New York Philharmonic rehearsal at Carnegie

Hall. Presenting himself to Artur Rodzinski as a young composer, he was allowed to sit in and attend the rehearsals, quickly being adopted as the orchestra's mascot and meeting Arturo Toscanini, Leonard Bernstein, and various musicians from the Philharmonic who would soon become his friends, and later his first interpreters. But three years after his arrival, the Carnegie Hall board changed, and the new director soon told Louis Hardin that with such an outfit, he would not be welcome at the rehearsals anymore. Hardin answered that he dressed and thought as he pleased, before leaving the premises. Somewhat offended by this episode, he decided to leave New York for the lands of the Navajo tribe, in the hope he could stay and live with them. Unfortunately, and despite an undeniable talent as a flutist and percussionist, he still remained a white man, and was therefore unwelcome.

Returning to New York in the late 1940s, he adopted his "nom de guerre," Moondog, a tribute to a dog from his childhood. He also came back with his first trimba, an instrument he had invented whose sound would slowly become his trademark. In order to save money for the fees of the copyists who transcribed his music from Braille or from musical dictation, and echoing the nomadic lifestyle of the Native Americans, Moondog chose to live under the porches of the Big Apple's buildings, turning these places into makeshift stages where he presented his music to passersby. Tired of being repeatedly compared to Christ, he abandoned his monk's robes and morphed into a Viking warrior, in reference to his hypothetical Nordic roots. This strange character and his unusual rhythms fascinated the bustling jazz scene of the time. After finishing their own gigs, famous jazzmen would sometimes join him to play—the likes of Charles Mingus, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, or Dave Brubeck, who invited him to open for his Modern Jazz Group in 1955.

During the 1950s, Moondog released several records for different labels before Columbia offered him the opportunity to record with the New York Philharmonic in 1969. The record resulting from this collaboration would prove to be a massive success. A second album for CBS followed, reinterpreted here by the Muzzix and Dedalus ensembles. Soon after this second release for the major label, Moondog started to grow weary of the streets that had not much left to offer, and considered moving to Europe, home of the great composers he had been so passionate about since his early childhood.

He left New York again for Germany in 1974, with the help of his friend Paul Jordan, an organist with relatives living in Frankfurt. The Viking of Sixth Avenue had vanished from the streets. Believed to be dead, he was being reborn on the other side of the Atlantic. Jordan had to return to New York, but Moondog wished to stay on the European soil he found so inspiring. Now almost in his sixties, he resumed his life in the streets, not knowing a soul and unfamiliar with the language. By chance, he was hosted by a young German, Tom "Tornado" Klatt, who introduced him to musician friends of his and to the manager of Kopf Records, which would become his European record label. Moondog subsequently got acquainted with Ilona Sommer, a young student who took him under her wing and invited him to live with her family. She became his copyist and founded a company dedicated to the publishing and promotion of his music. In what he called his "composer's paradise," Moondog was free to pursue his work, and before the end of the 1970s, he added four more albums to his discography. In the early 1980s, he met Stefan Lakatos, a young Swedish percussionist he recognized as the leading exponent of his method of drum playing, allowing him to concentrate exclusively on his composition work. Tirelessly working, he wrote his first three symphonies in Salzburg in 1983, as a tribute to Mozart, in just six weeks.

By the end of the decade, Moondog was shining again, this time in Europe. He performed in France, Sweden, and Germany, and in 1989, he was invited by his old friend Philip Glass to open the New Music America Festival in New York. There, he conducted the Brooklyn Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, playing pieces from his first album published by Columbia, as well as a few new compositions. The concert met with great acclaim, as the American public was delighted to learn that the endearing composer was still alive. At the beginning of the 1990s, he was diagnosed with severe diabetes, which didn't prevent him from working. He continued to compose, recorded an album for computers with Andi Toma and started working on saxophone pieces he later recorded with the London Saxophonic, an ensemble he toured with across Europe. Exhausted, he dedicated the end of his life to his duet for piano and percussions with the French pianist Dominique Ponty. She was on stage with him when he performed in the Arles Amphitheater in the summer of 1999, just one month before his fatal cardiac arrest in a Munster hospital on September 8, 1999. One can imagine his heart stopping to pulse in that 5/4 time signature which accompanied him throughout his life.

THE MADRIGALS, ROUND THE WORLD OF SOUND

The *Madrigals* series is one of Moondog's first compositions. As the 1950s dawned, he had already finished compiling eight songbooks entitled *Vocal Rounds Cycle*. Each of them comprises twelve songs, amounting to approximately a hundred melodies composed in just a few years.

Moondog regarded these short pieces as souvenirs of the first songs he was introduced to as a child, nursery rhymes such as "Three Blind Mice" or "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" that would stick with him throughout his prolific career. As early as 1949, he had already recorded an instrumental version of "All Is Loneliness," the first composition he penned shortly after returning to New York. The piece was featured on a series of 78rpm records published by Spanish Music Center, a small New York music label run by Gabriel Oller, a man on whose porch Moondog would regularly squat to perform his "Snaketime Rhythms." On *Moondog and His Friends*, released in 1953 on Epic Records, "All Is Loneliness" appeared again, this time titled "Instrumental Round," along with the madrigals "Voices of Spring," "Be a Hobo," and "Why Spend a Dark Night With Me?". In the mid-1950s, when his music was relatively successful, particularly among jazzmen, Moondog signed a three-album deal with the famous label Prestige Records. The first one of the series was in fact the reissue of an eponymous album originally published in 1956 on his very own label, featuring a version of "Trees Against the Sky." The second release on Prestige, still in 1956, also includes "All Is Loneliness," and ends with the "Moondog Monologue," a monotonous reading of thirty-six distiches, the lyrics to the madrigals, set against a hypnotic 7/4 time signature.

One summer evening in 1968, while Moondog was staying with Philip Glass, he was introduced to Steve Reich and Jon Gibson. The three budding "Minimalists" were fascinated by the strong musical personality of a composer they considered a patriarch, and whom they crowned "the father of minimalist music." On that night, the four of them endlessly rehearsed the melodies of Moondog's canons. Having relocated to Europe, Moondog composed a new set of madrigals, *Navigators of the World*, based on the Norse mythology and comprising forty-five canons. The only recording made of it during his lifetime is "Burri Borr," sung a cappella in a church and featured on the extremely rare cassette album *Facet*, a very limited Swedish release from 1981. At the end of his career, during his rare public appearances, Moondog routinely declaimed some of his madrigals a cappella, usually three by three, as interludes between two musical pieces.

But the epitome of the madrigals is perhaps to be found on his second album for Columbia, entirely dedicated to his short musical poems and released in December 1971, two years after his eponymous debut for the label recorded with the New York Philharmonic, which was acclaimed by the critics and sold several thousand copies. Fellow New Yorkers then discovered that this strange-looking blind beggar was also a genius composer. In view of this initial success, and as the record deal was set for two albums, Columbia urged Moondog to turn to pop music for his second release.

Very strong-willed, the composer set his conditions, and when the idea of a more modern album was raised, his answer was that the most modern instrument on his new record might just as well be a piano or a guitar. He used them alongside more ancient ones, including a primitive pipe organ, a virginal, a harpsichord, and a viola da gamba, in the purest mixed-genre tradition he loved so much. As for the repertoire, Moondog knew perfectly well the musical territories he wanted to explore, and this time, his madrigals would be in the limelight. His desire to rework on his sung canons emerged in April 1971, when he found himself reacquainted with his ex-wife Suzuko and their daughter June. He had been estranged from them for ten years, and June was now a teenager with a magnificent voice. *Moondog 2, Round the World of Sound*, is dedicated to her, and features the father reunited with his daughter singing together twenty-five of his first madrigals.

This twenty-five piece selection is entitled *Madrigal Book 1*, and is a nod to the system Johann Sebastian Bach used for his *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Here, Moondog passes through all the major and minor tonalities, following the cycle of fourths. Thus, the opening “Bells Are Ringing” is in C major, followed by “Voices of Spring” in A minor, “What’s the Most Exciting Thing?” in F major and so on until the return to C major with “Sparrows.” The album spans twenty years of composing and bohemian life in the very heart of Manhattan, on its streets and under its porches. The record features pieces from the early 1950s (“All Is Loneliness,” “Be a Hobo”) as well as later canons written in June 1968. The early ones comprise four vocal parts and the 5/4 or 7/4 time signatures characteristic of Moondog’s music, whereas the compositions of 1968 evolve in more conventional meters of 4/4, 2/4, or 3/4, but can deploy as many as seven parts (“What’s the Most Exciting Thing?”). All are autobiographical, or at least reflect the state of mind of their author. As such, they are either melancholic or cheerful, and can evoke the everyday life (“Coffee Beans”) or a longing for recognition (“Maybe”), at all times vibrant with his good turns of phrase and his distinctive philosophy. This collection constitutes a marvelous open window on Moondog’s universe.

—Amaury Cornut, December 2015
(Translated by Pierre Loechner)

Since 2009 Amaury Cornut has worked to promote the life and work of the composer Louis Thomas Hardin aka Moondog. Author of the French biography, he also gives conferences throughout France and founded a strings and percussion ensemble to play some rare material. He now works with original Moondog musicians like Stefan Lakatos, Dominique Ponty, and Jean-Jacques Lemêtre.

To reduce the music of Louis Thomas Hardin to the legendary figure of Moondog would be to pass over the real work of the composer. The melodic invention, the prodigious rhythms, and the mixture of genres, as original as they are obvious, all come together to form a music that merits consideration strictly as music.

To interpret Moondog's *Madrigals*, we wanted to develop aspects of the original recording of 1970, but also to produce a "live" version, one that would express the vitality and energy of ensemble music, and in order to enrich the instrumentation we chose a different combination of instruments for each piece. "Bells Are Ringing" opens the cycle, with all families of instruments taking their turns: guitars, keyboards, strings, saxophones, brass. "Imagine" is also a piece where all the instruments play, and here the orchestration changes during the composition. Voice 1 is first played by a saxhorn, then by a classic French keyboard, the *épinette*, and then by the two together. Voice 2 is played by the cello, then the guitar, then both, and so on.

"Be a Hobo" has the most reduced orchestration, with only two acoustic guitars, somehow evoking the music of Harry Partch. Each madrigal corresponds to a different instrumental color: Plucked strings accompany the chorus of women's voices in "Voices of Spring"; wind instruments play the very jazzy "With My Wealth"; a piano "solo" played by four musicians and a chorus of men for "Trees Against the Sky"; "Coffee Beans" is given to the whole family of strings (piano, *épinette*, cello, bass, guitars); and the somber "You the Vandal" is interpreted by bowed strings and saxophones.

Sometimes particular instruments are chosen for one piece: The soprano saxophone suggests a snake charmer in the very Oriental "Nero's Expedition"; the double bass and baritone saxophone evoke the delicacy of "Tiny Butterfly" while glockenspiel and toy piano produce a kind of ethereal alchemy in "Behold." For the percussion, the motor of Moondog's music, Stéphane Garin faithfully maintained the percussion of the original but also distributed special instruments like the guiro, cabassa, shekeré, and maracas to different musicians, at the same time reserving the center for the Argentine bombos, which transport us to the world of American Indians.

Finally, *Round the World of Sound* is an album of songs, and the singers were employed in many ways: alone or in duets, polyphonic (sometimes a capella) or in chorus, and sometimes the musicians added their own voices to those of Vincent Bouchot and Nathalie Duong.

When we were invited to play this music in a festival that contained many types of music, the organizer asked to try to define the genre, and we answered, "Well, let's just call it pop chamber music."

—Didier Aschour (translated by Tom Johnson)

Created in 1996 by Didier Aschour, **Dedalus** is a contemporary experimental-music ensemble based in Montpellier, France. Their repertoire comprises a large number of flexible scores across the spectrum of American and European new music from the 1960s to today. Dedalus is a collective where every musician collaborates in orchestration and interpretation. Dedalus is a leading ensemble in France and performs extensively at festivals and concert series across France and Europe. A noted champion of contemporary American experimental music, the ensemble has premiered works by Tom Johnson, Christian Wolff, Alvin Lucier, Phill Niblock, Frederic Rzewski, and James Tenney before French audiences.

Muzzix is a collective composed of thirty musicians, based in Lille, active since the end of the nineties. Its musical universe spans contemporary jazz to experimental and improvised music, performed in various ways, from solo performances to full orchestra, from concerts to installations. The global project of Muzzix is to create the conditions of production and distribution for creations that explore contemporary musical and sound languages, while always favoring an approach of experimentation. Currently, more than thirty projects express the creativity and keenness of its musicians, who perform locally in France, and more and more frequently abroad, throughout Europe, Asia, and North America.

Didier Aschour, guitar and artistic director, voice (23) and additional percussion

Christian Pruvost, trumpet and co-director, voice (6, 7, 10, 13, 15, 17, 19, 23, 25) and additional percussion

Stéphane Garin, percussion, glockenspiel

Peter Orins, drums

Vincent Bouchot, voice (1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25), piano (23)

Nathalie Duong, voice (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21, 24, 25), piano (23) and additional percussion

Sakina Abdou, alto and baritone saxophone, recorder, spinet (16), voice (2, 7, 10, 12, 13, 19) and additional percussion

Julien Favreuil, soprano and tenor saxophone, flute, voice (23) and additional percussion

Denis Chouillet, piano and toy piano, spinet (2), voice (6, 11, 20) and additional percussion

Barbara Dang, spinet and organ, piano (23), voice (3, 5, 10) and additional percussion

Deborah Walker, cello, piano (16), voice (2, 5, 12, 15, 25) and additional percussion

Sébastien Beaumont, electric and classical guitar, banjo and additional percussion

Nicolas Mahieux, double bass, voice (23) and additional percussion

Maxime Morel, saxhorn, trombone and additional percussion

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Moondog/Moondog 2. BGO Records BGOCD510.

The Story of Moondog. 4 Men With Beards 4M177. (LP)

Moondog: The German Years 1977–1999. Roof Records RD 2433221. (2 CDs)

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Gnida, Wolfgang. *Moondog*. Moondogscorner: Bottrop, Germany, 2015.

Scotto, Robert. *Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue: The Authorized Biography*. Process Media: New York, 2007.

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Francis Goelet (1926–1998), *In Memoriam*

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MOONDOG AKA LOUIS T. HARDIN (1916–1999)
ROUND THE WORLD OF SOUND

Dedalus & Muzzix

80774-2

1. *Bells Are Ringing* (1968) 2:23
2. *Voices of Spring* (1950s) 1:45
3. *What's the Most Exciting Thing?* (1968) 2:18
4. *All Is Loneliness* (1950) 2:48
5. *My Tiny Butterfly* (1950s) 1:43
6. *Why Spend a Dark Night With Me?* (1950) :59
7. *Coffee Beans* (1968) 2:31
8. *Down Is Up* (1951) 2:00
9. *Be a Hobo* (1951) 1:18
10. *Remember* (1968) 1:11
11. *I Love You* (1950s) 1:08
12. *Nero's Expedition* (1968) 3:04
13. *No, the Wheel Was Never Invented* (1951) 1:00
14. *With My Wealth* (1950s) 3:07
15. *This Student of Life* (1951–52) 1:26
16. *Some Trust All* (1950) 1:36
17. *Wine, Women and Song* (1950s) 2:01
18. *Sadness* (1951–52) 1:49
19. *Maybe* (1968) 2:39
20. *Each Today* (1950s) 2:20
21. *Imagine* (1968) 2:43
22. *You, the Vandal* (1950s) 1:53
23. *Trees Against the Sky* (1951) :59
24. *Behold* (1968) 2:43
25. *Sparrow* (1968) 2:05

TT: 49:32