

Heliosonic Toneways Denied Large Ensemble Grammy Contention

On Eclipse Day, Aug. 21, 2017, ScienSonic Laboratories released *Heliosonic Toneways, Vol. 1*, a Large Ensemble project commemorating the 50th anniversary of *The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra*. This historic recording reunites original participant Marshall Allen (now 94) with the engineer of the original LP, as well as the actual bass marimba that Sun Ra played on the session... along with a cast of some of New York's most creative improvisors. We at ScienSonic Laboratories were excited enough about this project to invest in a membership in the Recording Academy (NARAS), which administers the Grammys, and enter *Heliosonic Toneways* for award consideration in the Large Jazz Ensemble category. By now many of you know that we were ultimately refused entry in this category, despite meeting the requirements stated for it on the Academy site.

This came as a surprise to us (literally - we had no idea until the official ballot was released), especially considering that the Academy website specifies a minimum of nine players to qualify for Large Ensemble... and the "Heliosonic Tone-Tette" consists of ten (with every member playing on every track).

Why were we denied entry? We don't know... and they aren't saying. We were told only that the album was "CAREFULLY SCREENED by our committees and their decision is final." Since the minimum personnel requirement was met - along with the other requirements regarding distribution, internet presence etc. - it's hard not to conclude that the committee reacted unfavorably to the highly unusual nature of this music, as well as its unorthodox instrumentation (bass marimba, timpani, piccolo, theremin etc.), which perhaps did not sound "big band-y" enough to committee ears.

We might have thought that considerations of musical merit - or what a large ensemble ought to sound like - would best be decided by the voters themselves. But the gatekeepers at NARAS did not give them that chance.

There are no sour grapes here at ScienSonic Laboratories! We certainly did not expect any award... only the right to compete with the other "large ensembles," some of which

are actually smaller than the Tone-Tette.

We've long felt that "experimental" or "avant garde" improvisational music (call it what you will) is largely shut out of the Grammy awards, and this experience certainly seems to bear that out. The music of Anthony Braxton, Roscoe Mitchell, John Zorn and others has worldwide impact and influence... and yet these artists have little chance of netting an award in the "jazz" category, lumped in with Herbie Hancock and other major jazz stars. We at ScienSonic Laboratories would like to see a new Grammy category dedicated to this highly creative music. At the very least, let us in to the categories you have!

Pursuing a chance at a Large Ensemble Grammy nomination has been a distraction (and an expense). We now return our focus to the work of bringing you our highly imaginative projects, music that doesn't fit into the neat little boxes: our "*Worlds of Tomorrow Through Sound*." Many thanks to our loyal and adventurous listeners. They don't fit into the little boxes either!

For more on the *Heliosonic Toneways* project, see:

http://www.sciensonic.net/Recordings_Detail.cfm?rid=11