

SIDE A

1. **SUPERTONIC** (5:31)
2. **THE GOD PARTICLE** (4:31)
3. **MARRAKESH MEMOSPHERE** (9:12)

SIDE B

4. **TO THE JACKPOT** (9:46)
5. **PEACE PIECE** (12:36)

Album produced by Jarvis & Leyh
Engineered & Mixed by Blake Leyh, except (2) Mixed by Blake Leyh & Paul Urmson
Mastered by Paul Blakemore • Lacquer cut by Clint Holley
Band photography by Laura Kimmel • N2P Styling & Clothes by Bianca Allen
Art direction & Design by Blake Leyh • Red Tentacles and N2P Logo by Rupa DasGupta

LINER NOTES BY MARK DERY

All songs written by Blake Leyh & Tony Jarvis, published by Ground Loop Music (BMI) & Theophilus Tones (ASCAP) except "Supertonic" written by Blake Leyh, Tony Jarvis, & Bruno Coon, published by Ground Loop Music (BMI), Theophilus Tones (ASCAP), & Ochossi Music (ASCAP) and "Peace Piece" written by Bill Evans, published by Folkways Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI). © & © 2020 N to The Power / Xenotone. All Rights Reserved.

MUSICIANS:

Bernard Boateng - percussion (1) • **Bruno Coon** - trumpet, guitar, percussion (1,2,3,4)
Yves Dharamraj - cello (4, 5) • **Tony Jarvis** - bass clarinet, sax, flute, guitar (1-5)
Kaya Jarvis - additional cello (1) • **Blake Leyh** - bass, cello, percussion, guitar (1-5)
Ryoko Leyh - melodica (1,4) • **Smoota** - trombone (2,4) • **Yusuke Yamamoto** - vibes (1,2,3,5)
Meredith Yayanos - violin (5)



AUTOGENESIS 2

N TO THE POWER • AUTOGENESIS



XENOTONE

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It was shortly after the tin-pot monarch of Mar-A-Lago assumed the presidency that Blake Leyh decided, as Tony Jarvis recalls it, that “in these times we need to create art.” A Harlem-based composer, multi-instrumentalist, and sound designer who’s worked with The Coen Brothers, John Waters, Spike Lee, and Jonathan Demme, not to mention serving as music supervisor for *The Wire* and *Treme* (which won him a Grammy nomination and an Emmy award), Leyh “was tired of working alone in a dark room with machines.” More to the point, he wanted to do something, in these “very dark times,” that felt “personally meaningful, connecting with other people.”

Jarvis was one of those people. A jazz saxophonist, bass clarinetist, guitarist, and composer, he’d studied with Roscoe Mitchell (of the legendary Art Ensemble of Chicago), cut his eyeteeth on punk with his SST Records band the Tar Babies, and played with Sharon Jones & The Dap Kings, Charles Bradley, and in the Broadway musical *Fela!*

“After the tragedy of Trump’s election win, Blake suggested we work on some music as a way of injecting some human spirit/truth/creativity into this climate,” he says. “A protest of sorts.” Making art seemed like a radical act in an America ruled by a carny barker who doesn’t read, a braying mountebank with the cultural literacy of a greasy-faced brownshirt in a Munich beer hall, circa 1923. “When everything you care about suddenly feels threatened, how do you respond to that as an artist, as a creative person?” says Leyh.

“Radical diversity,” was the answer, he thought, maybe even “militant diversity.” A name came to him: N to The Power. N, as in: an unknown quantity; an ever-expanding number of possibilities. The group would navigate by far-flung stars: The Meters, Steve Reich, Lee “Scratch” Perry, Sun Ra, the hiccupping polyrhythms and polyphonic singing of the Bayaka pygmies, Erik Satie, and of course Fela Kuti. Following the lead of Fela’s large ensemble, a floating village held together not just by musical bonds but by radical politics and social ties, N to The Power would be more than just a band. Embracing hybridity, it would cross notated music with punk’s anti-aesthetic of smash-it-up amateurism, jazz improvisation with what Jarvis calls the “intricate combinations of simple motifs” familiar from minimalism and Afrobeat—hypnotic, interlocked rhythms and melodies that, depending on where your consciousness wanders, shift between foreground and background, the aural equivalent of Escher’s optical illusions.

“Supertonic” is a case in point. A loping, Afro-tronic study in fast-moving motionlessness, the song exploits the mesmerizing effect of superimposed rhythms—“fours and threes and fives and sixes and 12’s, all happily co-existing against each other,” is how Leyh describes it—against a static harmonic backdrop. The percussive piston driving the piece is a rhythmic motif typically played, in West African music, on a djembe but here played on guitar.

When the two collaborators get going, fueled by caffeine, the ideas come thick and fast. They talk of “soloing without soloing”; of substituting, for conventional harmony, latticeworks of interlaced melody lines (which is why you won’t hear the guitars or keyboards playing chords, in their music). N to The Power’s free-floating, aching lyrical reading of “Peace Piece” by Bill Evans

exemplifies the rootlessness (in the musical sense of not being strongly key-centric) that they’re striving for. “I loved this piece for many years and made an arrangement for electric guitar and loops before the band existed, then electric cello and loops as the band was starting,” says Leyh. “We intend to have a 60-minute version, which will have a basic pattern similar to the current version, but with additional soloists improvising on top of it.”

Jarvis talks about wanting to tap into the voltage of early New Orleans music, where the trumpet and the clarinet would be blowing flat-out, goading each other to dizzier heights of improvisation. “For me,” he says, “that’s a whole world!” Leyh wants to transport you through a mental wormhole, too, using digital delays and loops to warp psychological time and space the way Lee Perry did on his dub-reggae masterpiece “Roast Fish & Cornbread” (1978) or Miles Davis did on “He Loved Him Madly” (1974), an eerie, echoing spacewalk into psychedelic jazz-rock by way of Stockhausen-esque avant-gardism. Leyh wants to make music like that, music that seems to be happening in some otherworldly space, and that, “when you really reckon with it,” takes you there.

“The God Particle” does just that. Inspired by the tabloid headline, “Stephen Hawking Says ‘God Particle’ Could Wipe Out the Universe!” (about the Higgs boson, an elementary particle discovered by the Large Hadron Collider), it’s a churning, irresistibly danceable Afro-funk groove that sounds like an outtake from *Remain in Light* by Talking Heads, with nods to the hocketed vocal melodies of the pygmies and the second line strut of New Orleans brass bands. There’s even a dub-inspired section where the percussive bottom drops out of the mix and the breathy huffs, honks, and key clicks of Jarvis’s bass clarinet are left drifting weightlessly through a huge, reverberant space—Lee Perry’s idea of zero gravity.

In Trump’s Fortress America—a mean-spirited “moronic inferno” (Martin Amis) of ICE raids and tiki-torch Nazis, nativist know-nothings and Twitter trolls, Muslim bans and privatized detention centers where toddlers are caged—the Two Minutes Hate never ends. Against that backdrop, N to The Power’s musical heteroglossia feels like a kind of activism. What was postmodern quotation, in the ‘80s, looks, in a moment when the air is thick with the combustible fumes of racist violence and xenophobia, like a political statement.

“It seems weird,” Leyh muses, “because other people are, like, ‘Well, we need to go march in the street’ or ‘we need to write protest songs,’ but to me it doesn’t feel decadent to be figuring out how to make seven against five drum and guitar patterns in a room in Harlem. It feels like a response, although I don’t understand how those things are connected.” Jarvis thinks the “radical diversity” of N to The Power’s aesthetic is its politics. “If we mix things up in the way that we’re talking about,” he says, “it speaks for itself.”

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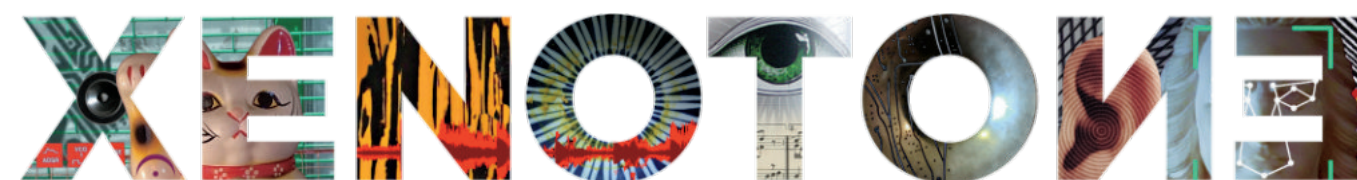
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