

Victim of the Sky was excerpted from live jams in the studio last year, and released a couple of months ago. It's a more organized affair than the first album, which has its good and bad points. While some of the pieces are still totally spontaneous, some have words which were written down beforehand—but the band never heard them before the taping—and on some the music was written beforehand, but never played before the taping. (The list of cuts is indexed with little symbols so you can tell.)

Copernicus himself hasn't changed a lot, but the band has rather mellowed out, gliding into space-jazz improvisations of a Sun Ra sort, both more slick and more ethereal than on the first album, and without the noisy fury. They've become a backdrop or a surrealistic soundtrack for Copernicus' stream of consciousness imagery, which in turn has gotten a bit more narrative.

One of my faves is a humorous rant, "Bacteria." The band burbles and glugs like the primordial ooze while Joe orates, "When bacteria dominated the Earth and there were no humans! The Pope is descended from bacteria! Ronald Reagan is descended from bacteria! Bruce Springsteen is descended from bacteria!" Then he cracks himself up by reminding us, "Copernicus does not exist—therefore he could never descend!"

"In Terms Of Money" is a rather slick bit of cool avant-jazz in the Laurie Anderson-Peter Gordon mode, which lends a bracing irony to Copernicus' repeated minotaur bellow "Don't let me measure my life in terms of money!" "Not Him Again!" is also unusually slick for Copernicus. It must have started out with him jamming to a drum machine, then they went back and screwed with the tape, speeding up a section so that he sounds like a chipmunk (singing "La Marseillaise"), slowing down another to a monstrous, diabolical chuckle.

Probably the most poetic and spooky bit is "Victim of the Night." Joe raves with feverish visions reminiscent of Verlaine or Baudelaire, like hearing a sleepwalker narrating his nightmare:

*It's gonna be like the beach.
The pebbles rolling through my veins.
Touching you.
Swaying alone.
When you scream.
In all the beach.
Kissing.
And I know the atoms.
I know the universe...
Standing still like the victim of the
sky...*

It ends with him raving off into a place where language doesn't work anymore, shouting "Oh so za zapata zu zu zu zu zu zu!"

Even if you're a sucker for this weirdo stuff, you have to bear in mind that these cuts are the high points snipped from many hours of spontaneous fooling around, which must also have produced many albums' worth of

waste and boredom. Even at that rate, these albums aren't without their low points and downright mistakes. "The Lament of Joe Apples," for instance, is a 10-minute dramatic monologue in which Copernicus plays Ralph Cramden by way of Bukowski, clinging to the rail, drunkenly ranting and mooring at and slobbering over his wife and kids. It's the sort of piece that's fascinating once, maybe twice, and it takes up most of side two of *Victim*. There's a long, rambling rant on *Nothing Exists*, "Let Me Rest," which I also found myself skipping over after a couple of plays.

But what the hey, this is virgin territory the guy is exploring, some uncharted back-of-the-mind regions where only the Beefhearted fear not to tread, where the music, words, images and passions bounce around like wandering atoms, colliding sometimes, kissing sometimes, sometimes making art and sometimes making nonsense. You can't just slip into Copernicus like a hot bubbly tub of pop music, but by the same token this stuff sticks with you a lot longer.

Copernicus is not totally unique; there are other weirdo visionaries out there doing similar stuff. Then again, they're mostly pretty obscure, and you have to start somewhere. If you can't find these albums in the store, you can order them for \$8.00 each from Copernicus, Box 150, Brooklyn N.Y. 11217.