

When Jordan Belson died in San Francisco in 2011 he left behind a great many surprises in the modest apartment he occupied for almost fifty years in the old bohemian neighborhood of North Beach. Small closets were treasure chests packed with paintings, drawings, films, audio tapes, correspondence, notebooks and diaries, collages and assemblages. Having more or less withdrawn from society by the early 1970s, Belson created his works in solitude. He occasionally shared them with a few close friends, and after living with the works himself for a short period of time, he wrapped and stored them away. In recent years, while unpacking and cataloging Belson's archives, numerous reels of his original music made on the autoharp (circa 1972) were uncovered. It is from these recordings that this release is drawn.

For Jordan Belson sound was an integral component to his films. As he told Larry Sturhahn in 1975: "I don't think I would be interested in film if it didn't have sound; to tell the truth, that's what makes film more interesting than painting. I'm not interested in silent movies."* Because Belson's visual imagery is so dazzling (or perhaps because sound and image are so well integrated) viewers don't always focus on Belson's soundtracks, but an examination of his filmography shows a sensibility very much on the cutting edge of music and sound: Be-bop in the late 1940s, musique concrète in the 1950s, tape music and electronics in the 1960s, the Farfisa organ and Buchla synthesizer (with Steve Beck) in the 1970s, soon followed by an interest in ambient and so-called "new age" music. Although he sometimes used soundtracks by others (Pierre Schaeffer, John Luther Adams, Maggi Payne), by working with two TEAC recorders Belson himself composed many of his finest soundtracks in much the same way he created his films—with an ingenious set of rudimentary tools, and a prodigious imagination.

Passages from the autoharp tapes can be heard in Belson's film *Light* (1973), but the many extended improvised compositions he edited and preserved on reel-to-reel tape were most likely intended as stand-alone works—assuming he even considered them as such. During this period Belson was deeply involved with his yoga study and practice, including nada yoga—which deals with sound manifestation through mantras, singing bowls, or simply the spontaneous manifestation of sound relating to the chakras, or specific meditative states. (In the same interview with Sturhahn, Belson cites Ramesh Mishra's *The Fundamentals of Yoga* for just such a list.) Sound and vibration as natural phenomena are elements that link the personal with the universal, and for Belson this concept lays at the heart of animation—not only in the filmic sense but in the larger sense of the animating spirit or life force. Prototypes for the autoharp music might be the austere, enigmatic works of Gurdjieff and Thomas de Hartmann, or the many compositions by Franz Liszt that explore the composer's contemplative side: *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, *Transcendental Études*, or his many religious compositions arranged for pianoforte—all works that were especially dear to Belson. One thing Jordan Belson insisted upon was that his works were not meant to be quickly consumed: they were intended as objects of contemplation, to be lived with over time and slowly absorbed into one's life.

– Raymond Foye
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* Larry Sturhahn, Interview with Jordan Belson.
Filmmakers Newsletter, May 1975. pp 23–26.