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Bio information: **UNIVERS ZERO**

Title: **CLIVAGES** (Cuneiform Rune 295)

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FILE UNDER: ROCK / CHAMBER ROCK / EXPERIMENTAL / CLASSICAL

“...an indispensable release for anyone who believes that "Bartók" and "rock" can fit comfortably in the same sentence.”

– *All Music Guide*

“Univers Zero's vision (is) pretty much unique & for those touched by it, nothing else will quite do...a sound that really couldn't be any other band in the world.” – *The Rough Guide To Rock*

The Belgian band **Univers Zero** is legendary for their uncompromising musical vision – a sound and stance *Keyboard* described as “Chamber music for the Apocalypse”. Simultaneously medieval & modern, its distinctive, dark and elegantly beautiful music has set the standard for “chamber rock”, a New Music hybrid of Francophone origin and worldwide appeal that UZ pioneered. UZ’s singular sound derives from its unique instrumentation (piano and keyboards, violin, clarinets saxophone, oboe, bassoon, English horn, electric bass, drums) combined with brooding gothic imagery, elements of European folk and other world musics, the iconoclasm and intensity of rock, the relentless sonic experimentation of the avant garde, and leader and composer **Daniel Denis**’ classically-inspired writing style, influenced by early 20th Century avant garde classical composers. In the hands of some of the best musicians in Europe, these factors result in a group on the cutting edge of creating a new, vital, and unique fusion of classical and rock music. The band has remained on the cutting edge of New Music throughout the course of a career that began in the ‘70s and continues today, stretching and disintegrating the boundaries of classical and rock music alike to create a new, vital, and unique fusion. Today, several decades after Univers Zero first forged its unique sound, critics cite its oeuvre as the precursor to the best avant-garde rock and classical music of the present day, from post-rock, associated with **Godspeed You! Black Emperor**, **Secret Chiefs 3**, **Kayo Dot**, **Tortoise** and other instrumentally-based rock bands – to the numerous late 20th/early 21st century classical chamber ensembles integrating rock into their repertoire, such as **Bang on a Can**, **Kronos Quartet** and others. When Cuneiform recently released a remastered reissue of the band’s self-titled debut album, critics who heard the band’s music for the first time called it a “revelation”, “..the hidden source for every one of today’s avant-garde rock bands” [*Organ*].

One of the founding members of the “**Rock In Opposition**” [**RIO**] movement, a late 70s, European-wide coalition for alternative and uncommercial music, Univers Zero was founded in 1974. During its first five years, it was co-led by **Daniel Denis** and **Roger Trigaux**, and released 2 albums. Univers Zero’s first album was called “1977’s darkest musical vision” by *Alternative Press*. Its second album, **Heresie** [1979] is widely considered one of the darkest and most menacing albums of all time. After *Heresie*’s release, Trigaux left the band to found **Present**. Univers Zero continued on with Denis at the helm to release **Ceux Du Dehors** [1981]; **Crawling Wind** [1983], and **UZED** [1984] and **Heatwave** [1986]. Distinctive but never stagnant, UZ’s sound evolved and progressed with each release, with each album getting more distinctly electric, while still keeping their 'gothic elements' intact. *Heatwave* was released on **Cuneiform**, beginning a long term relationship with the label. Shortly afterwards, in 1987, Denis disbanded Univers Zero for a decade.

During the 1990s and very early 2000s, Cuneiform reissued Univers Zero’s entire back catalogue on CD. The music proved timeless; the reissues received an astounding amount of critical acclaim and helped expand the band’s fan base worldwide. In 1990, *Keyboard* remarked: “It’s stunning how well Univers Zero’s 1977 debut holds up, musically and sonically, compared to...anything else happening in so-called new music.” With UZ dormant, **Denis** released two solo albums, **Les Eaux Troubles** [1991] and **Sirius and the Ghost** [1993]. As the decade drew to a close, he reformed Univers Zero for a single, sold out appearance at 1997’s **FIMAV** (Festival International Musique Actuelle Victoriaville) in Canada.

Denis revived UZ as a studio project at the close of the 20th Century, and proceeded to release a series of recordings that thrilled old and new fans alike. The first of these recordings, 1999’s **The Hard Quest**, was greeted as a “Brilliant comeback album by an important avant garde band” [*Crohinga Well*]. UZ’s next release, 2002’s **Rhythmix**, featured UZ’s largest lineup and marked a return to more acoustic palettes. It was praised as “a postmodern work of the first order” [*Pulse!*] and “One of the decade’s masterworks, in any genre.” [*Exposé*] UZ expanded this acoustic palette with electronics, experimental and jazz elements, and more spacious, melodic compositions for its next, 9th CD, **Implosion**, released in 2004. *AMG* noted that “Univers Zero’s excellence lies in its continuing ability to synthesize medieval forms, instrumental prog rock and modern classical dissonance with a splash of jazz, and a taste for the suggestively macabre.”

In 2004, Univers Zero celebrated its 30th anniversary by returning to live performance. Denis assembled a sextet lineup of top-notch musicians. The sextet performed (often headlining) at many of the world’s most prestigious festivals of New Music, world music, progressive music, and jazz. Since their reformation, Univers Zero has played at major festivals world-wide, including **NEARfest** (USA); **MIMI Festival** (France), **Les Tritonales** (France), the **Music Meeting Festival** (The Netherlands), **Rock In Opposition** (France), **Audi Jazz Festival** (Belgium), **Gouevia Artrock Festival** (Portugal), **Nancy Jazz Pulsations** (France) and has also appeared at various high profile venues and festivals in Canada, Mexico, Poland, Czech Republic and Germany.

In 2006, UZ released its 10th recording and first-ever live CD, appropriately called **Live. Sea of Tranquility** gave it 5 stars, stating that: “This is as good as it gets folks, a live album from six superb musicians, playing music that is so far removed from mainstream culture, yet so accessible and enjoyable to anyone willing to give their complex yet rich style a chance. Highly, highly recommended!”

[*Clivages press release continued on verso...*]

2008 brought forth a stunningly improved, remixed version of the group's classic first album, a landmark recording that marked the birth of Chamber Rock. Called *Univers Zero* (and known alternately over the years as *1313*), it had originally been recorded at a small studio on semi-professional equipment. For the album's 20th anniversary, Denis' long time engineer **Didier de Roos** went back to the original 8-track multi-channel tapes and managed to wring out more sound and better balances from the tapes than was thought possible. Cuneiform's 2008 *Univers Zero* remaster received worldwide acclaim; critics called it "the hidden source for every one of today's avant-garde rock bands" (Organ) and "a blueprint for classical music of the 21st century" (All About Jazz). Shortly after this CD, another archival release, called *Relaps*, came out in in 2009. *Relaps* consisted of previously unreleased concert recordings from 1984-86; *Sea of Tranquility* called it "amazing stuff, more proof of just how unique and powerful this Belgian band always was".

With all this activity in terms of releases, it is easy to overlook the fact that Univers Zero has not had a release of new material in over 5 years. *Clivages* is that release, but much more importantly, it is its first studio release in over 20 years - since 1986's *Heatwave* - to feature the energy and sound of a working, rehearsing, on-going live ensemble performing together in the studio. *Clivages* features Univers Zero's current line-up, which has been playing concerts and working together for quite some time now: **Michel Berckmans** (bassoon, English horn, oboe), **Kurt Budé** (clarinet, bass clarinet, alto sax), **Pierre Chevalier** (keyboards), **Daniel Denis** (drums, sampler), **Dimitri Evers** (bass), **Martin Lauwers** (violin) with guest **Andy Kirk** (who was a member of the band in 1979-1983, 1985-86 and has been an ongoing guest in performances for the last several years as time allows) (guitar and percussion).

Clivages represents both a consolidation of sound from Univers Zero's past 30 years of work, as well as some steps in new directions, as befitting a band that has made forward motion part of its DNA. Most notably, Denis has opened up the compositional duties to other members of the band, allowing Berckmans, Budé and Kirk to contribute some very strong pieces to the UZ 'book' and giving *Clivages* a sound that while recognizable as Univers Zero, also contains some real surprises. Univers Zero is rightly famous for finding the perfect balance between classical and rock influences and drawing on musicians from both worlds. In terms of this, *Clivages* is possibly its best-balanced release. It is perhaps also the album that allows these two sides to separate more than any other album in their catalog, as the title ("cleavages") implies. *Clivages* features chamber works scored solely for the trio of strings, reeds and double reeds within the larger group. But Univers Zero's rock side has certainly not been ignored; in particular, Andy Kirk's piece "Warrior" harkens back to the wild, barely-contained, electric sound of *Heatwave*. *Clivages* is a tremendously strong work from a band that has an astoundingly full catalog of essential discs!

Univers Zero continues to add new material to its repertoire and continues to perform live at festivals and other venues worldwide; see www.univers-zero.com. Three decades after it was first formed, Univers Zero continues to evolve, expand and experiment with the boundaries of New Music, and, to quote *Exposé*, ceaselessly "proving themselves to be one of the best and most important groups on the planet."

For more information, visit Univers Zero online at:
www.univers-zero.com & www.myspace.com/universzero

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS



Digital [High-Resolution / Color] versions of these images are available for download on www.cuneiformrecords.com in the "Press" section.

WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT UNIVERS ZERO'S ALBUMS:

UNIVERS ZERO **RELAPS-ARCHIVES 1984-1986** **CUNEIFORM** **2009**
This album features: Michel Delory [guitar]. Daniel Denis [drums], Dirck Descheemaeker [soprano sax, clarinet, bass clarinet], Christian Genet [bass], Patrick Hanappier [violin, viola], Andy Kirk [keyboards], André Mergen [cello, alto sax, voice], and Jean-Luc Plouvier [keyboards]

"Reissue: Best of the Week: UNIVERS ZERO - Relaps: Archives 1984 - 1986 (Cuneiform) –
...what a collection: selected from four gigs in Germany and Belgium, captured with great quality live sound that does justice to both the five-piece and later seven-piece version of the ensemble.

Once again, there's no moment of filler from Univers Zero. A rich stew of beautiful classical instrumentation - clarinets and sax, violin, cello and viola - with keyboards and rock bass and drums, each complex, driving composition is alive with dangerous energy and crackling tension from beginning to end. They're the seething antidote to the twee and complacent in rock/classical crossover, the Stravinsky- and Ligeti- influenced blast of reality that makes even King Crimson sound like Andrew Lloyd Webber. Other avant-rock bands dabble in dark, 20th-century passages: Univers Zero dive right in, exploring danger and menace and foreboding in all possible nuances...

These recordings catch Univers Zero with powers at full-strength - and fascinatingly, at a terrible time to be making this music, trapped in the shallows of the early 80s, soaring over the heads of the European music industry, ...

These concerts have Univers Zero playing later compositions that have moved on from the more acoustic, often early-music, medieval sound of their first album, with more keyboards and greater use of rock drum-kit. ...It all comes to a shattering climax on 'The Funeral Plain', a work that from quiet

beginnings builds and builds layers of fear... its utterly relentless, a soundtrack to induce predator-prey nightmares...that drives on to a quite unique sonic apocalypse. ...

Two years later...they split. Thank goodness...Cuneiform...continued to believe in the band, releasing back catalogue until a generation of listeners were ready for them. Univers Zero was reformed by Denis just before the new millennium... They're one of the great unsung rock bands of the last 30 years, and good enough to earn hesitant respect from the contemporary-classical world too. With its near studio sound and stupendous energy, 'Relaps' is as good a place to start with Univers Zero as their classic debut.”

– Sean, *Organ* [UK] #298, March 13, 2009, www.organart.demon.co.uk

“Quite the revelation here, Cuneiform Records offering up vintage live Univers Zero from the years 1984-1986... It's always amazing how dark, brooding, and often times heavy this 'RIO/chamber rock' institution can get, most of the time utilizing acoustic instruments... ..the world of Univers Zero... is often times unsettling, chaotic, and ominous music, yet there lies a uncurrent of extreme beauty... .

The dueling sax and cello outbursts on the extended "Presage" are mindblowing...the band hits you almost as a doom metal band would, tunes like "Emanations", the classic "Heatwave", and "The Funeral Plain" rampages through your speakers with the power of heavy rock, yet with the deft touch of classical or jazz. The version of "Heatwave" here is one of the most startling slices of avant-prog you will ever let your ears feast on, jagged shards of guitar, booming bass, squawking sax, layers of keyboards, soaring violon, and bombastic drum patterns all fighting for supremacy yet the overall effect is grandiose and majestic.

This is amazing stuff, more proof of just how unique and powerful this Belgian band always was, and still is for that matter. If you have a penchant for archival live prog recordings, make sure you add this one to your 'must have' list.”

– Pete Pardo, *Sea of Tranquility*, www.seaoftranquility.org

“...in 1984 and 1987, the Belgian ensemble Univers Zero released two albums that were among the best of an avant-garde scene that defied the cheesiness of the ['80s] era. *Uzed* and *Heatwave* explored electro-acoustic chamber music, with bandleader and primary composer Daniel Denis combining Bartok-ian gloom with dissonant guitar solos and insistent rhythms. *Relaps*...is the only live document of Univers Zero's *Uzed/Heatwave* period...the quality and intensity of the performances...indicate a remarkably practiced band. ...all of Denis' pieces from *Uzed* are included on the disc, along with the two major compositions from *Heatwave*, both...written by...keyboardist, Andy Kirk. While the studio recordings were marred by...dated production, the sound here is excellent-or at least as good a can be expected from 20-year-old tapes. ...The harrowing “Emanations” vacillates between quiet, stark passages and a dark intensity evident in the brief, clawing guitar solo that brings the piece to an epic and somber conclusion. “The Funeral Plain,” a sprawling 20-minute composition is the centerpiece of *Relaps*. ...The last few minutes...consist of an enthralling buildup, as a violin and clarinet share a propulsive theme, over which Michel Delory spews molten, Hendrix-like spasms of electric guitar. ...Denis is clearly in control throughout, his stickwork too complex to scan neatly as rock drumming or classical percussion. It's a good reminder that Univers Zero was ahead of its time, even if it was (and remains) lost between serious and popular music.”

– Brandon Wu, *Washington City Paper*, v. 29. n.4, Jan. 23-29, 2009

“Even some 30 odd years after it first came into existence, Belgian band Univers Zero sounds as though it's intent upon a soundtrack for the last days of the earth, or at least the last days of human life upon it. ... the live setting ensures the performances are even more malignantly visceral than they usually are.

It's often...that composers such as Ligeti are cited as influences or touchstones...but... Henry Cow and Van Der Graaf Generator are equally pertinent...both...fashioned music that stays within the rock idiom even while appearing to have little time for such genre trappings. All three bands have also utilized highly formal structures...

...this is a band with a different aesthetic agenda... The notion of dark fun might just about cover it, but even that does scant justice to such a singular band.”

– Nic Jones, *All About Jazz*, April 27, 2009, www.allaboutjazz.com

“...*Relaps* is an essential piece of work showing that the band's most exceptional moments were indeed live.

Roughly the disc is made of two main chunks of three tracks... The first ... includes mostly tracks from my fave album of theirs: *Uzed*...

...the last chunk comes...mostly from the future *Heatwave* album with ...the 9- mins Heatwave and the 18-mins Funeral Plain are both outstanding versions... Great stuff!!”

– Sean Trane, *Progarchives.com*

“...First up are a pair of performances from a quintet version of UZ ...What is so striking about these tracks is the stark difference between this band and the previous version that recorded *Ceux du Dehors*. This is a much more electric UZ. ...more powerful range of dynamics, without changing the overall sophistication and scope of either arranging or playing.

The latter version of UZ, recorded in 1985 and 1986...is the ultimate version of UZ in a live context. The contrasting keyboard sounds...offer a much more sinister and menacing quality to the music. The transformation of "Emanations," from the *Uzed* album, is simply shocking.

... For anyone who has been interested in this band, this set is simply indispensable. ...well worth investigating.”

– Thom Jurek, *All Music Guide*

“...*Relaps*' most impressive track *Relaps* is an 18-minute version of *Heatwave*'s “The Funeral Plain” that...builds with the inevitability of a bolero, albeit through a series of movements, towards its relentless and cathartic climax, complete with Michel Delory's screaming guitar and Denis' thundering percussion.

The markers of early UZ remain--a confluence of unorthodox instrumentation and classical references --but *Relaps* leaves little doubt that...Univers Zero of 1984-1986 was more hard-edged and even rockier than it had been in the '70s...”

– John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, www.allaboutjazz.com

Subtitled “Archives 1984-1986”, this disc ...contains live performances by the angriest incarnations – the 1984 quintet and the 1985-86 septet - of Daniel Denis' creature, one of the defining entities of Rock In Opposition... The material, mastered from clear enough archival tapes, comprises exciting renditions of classics such as “Présage” and “The Funeral Plain”, pieces delivered with a mixture of high-level technical proficiency, exquisite classical sensitiveness and...scarcely repressed fury...I feel older by the minute, yet the goosebumps that came up during some of these executions, most notably in the fantastic rhythmic unassailability of “Heatwave” (the tune), are the same of a couple of decades ago. What a group. And they're still here... “

– Michel Ricci, *Temporary Fault*, June 28, 2009, temporaryfault.blogspot.com

“I am ashamed to say that I came close to living out my entire life without ever hearing of them (oh how I love you, Cuneiform Records! Let me count the ways in 13/16th timing). Honestly, this is the holy grail of bent prog: pianos, violin, brass/woodwinds, guitar, kitchen sink, sultry lower back of orgasmic woman (pretty sure that's in there). Play with Birdsongs of the Mesozoic and the names I just dropped, or even Bitches Brew Miles Davis or John McLaughlin's 'Vishnu Orch or goddamned Black Flag or Damn good smoking stuff!!! Recorded live to beat all too. Dang!.... All tracks great, seriously.”

– Your Imaginary Friend, *ZooKeeper online, KZSU Radio*, 2009-04-06, zookeeper.stanford.edu

“...70 minutes of intense live rock in opposition. ...

Imagine chamber music given a healthy injection of ominous overtones and a progressive boost- and you have an idea of what Univers Zero sound like.

...

For all these darkside tendencies, there is a definite ebullience to the music. While menace is overtly present, the tunes celebrate a sense of intensity devoted to life... The compositions are intricate and cerebral...surging passages that...undergo rapid signature changes. A constant level of intensity...even the lulls are drenched with dramatic anticipation...”

– Matt Howarth, *Sonic Curiosity*, www.soniccuriosity.com

“... This eight-track collection culls...live performances from the mid-1980s, recorded...at four European shows. They emphasize the “rock” in “chamber rock” while stretching the sonic definitions of keyboards, violin, clarinet, oboe, bassoon, English horn and sax with the traditional electric bass/guitar/drum combo.”

– Michale Popke, *Goldmine*, April 10, 2009, www.goldminemag.com

UNIVERS ZERO *UNIVERS ZERO* CUNEIFORM 2008 REISSUE W BONUS TRACKS & REMASTER

(alternately known as *I313*; originally releases 1977 by UZ, 1977 by Atem, numerous intervening reissues, 1990 by Cuneiform)

Cuneiform 2008 album features: **Michel Berckmans** [bassoon], **Daniel Denis** [percussion], **Marcel Dufrane** [violin], **Christian Genet** [bass], **Patrick Hanappier** [violin, viola, pocket cello], **Emmanuel Nicaise** [harmonium, spinet], **Roger Trigaux** [guitar], and **Guy Segers** [bass, vocal, noise effects]

“ALBUM OF THE WEEK...Released in 1977, it was astonishing then: today, it sounds like the hidden source for every one of today's avant-garde rock bands. Chillingly beautiful, driven by the bassoon and cello more than the guitar and synth, each instrumental is both pastoral and burgeoning with terrible life. ... This is edgy beyond belief. ...Each piece magnificently refuses to deviate from its mood, its tense, thrilling, growling, restrained focus... The whole is like the rare, delicious bits of great film soundtrack that create menace and energy out of nowhere. ... Univers Zero are a revelation ...”

– Sean O., *Organ*, #274, September 18th, 2008

“UZ's debut remains both benchmark and landmark. Reissued numerous times over the years...this definitive version finally presents this unprecedented music the way it was meant to be heard, clarifying how—emerging out of nowhere with little history to precede it— UZ has been so vital in changing the way chamber music is perceived.

UZ's music was an antecedent for the kind of instrumental and stylistic interspersions considered normal today by groups including Bang on a Can and Alarm Will Sound. Henry Cow's complex, abstruse writing meets Bartok, Stravinsky, Messiaen and Ligeti, but with hints of early music, especially in UZ's use of spinet and harmonium. ...

... This welcome reissue confirms, once again, that in 1977 a nearly unheard-of group was creating a new kind of chamber music that, in its inclusion of rock instrumentation and the occasional rock stance, would be a blueprint for classical music of the 21st century.”

– John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, www.allaboutjazz.com, June 13, 2008

“Lately, many American groups, such as Zs, Kayo Dot and Normal Love, have been birthing *Tetsuo*-like sonic creatures — all metallic limbs and brash modern classical appendages jutting forth from a deformed prog rock body. Univers Zero's 1977 debut cast a dark foreshadow on this recent trend. Spinet, harmonium, bassoon and strings paint dissonant filigrees over a doom-laden and decidedly rock instrumental backdrop. The music is consistently ominous... when it occasionally gets dense, it's a slab of strange, ingenious orchestration you hear, rather than a simple overdriven amp sound. ...UZ's compositional structures surge and ooze. ... As with the younger generation that have inherited this approach, there are...psychedelic mystery and rough edges...”

– Nick Storrington, *Exclaim!*, www.exclaim.ca, September 2008

“Although Belgium's chamber rock band Univers Zéro is lumped into the general rock category, the ensemble should be more closely aligned with modern classical and the avant-garde. ...One listen...unveils dense, creatively challenging material...”

– Doug Simpson, *Audiophile Audition*, www.audaud.com, September 09, 2008

“...formed in 1975-6, a septet including bassoon, two violins, guitar, bass, and harmonium which could draw textural comparisons to the Third Ear Band, if it weren't for the incredible weight of lockstep rhythms placed behind the intricacies of pizzicato violin and muted guitar on the opening bars of such compositions as “Ronde.” ...

The key, of course, to what makes this music interesting is the exacting precision with which Denis' percussion hems in the music's pulse, drawing brusque black borders on intricate tonal shading. ...dancing inside a box is what Univers Zero's music is about. ... Coupled with astonishing sound, this is a reissue well worth investigating.”

– Clifford Allen, *Bagatellen*, www.bagatellen.com, October 26, 2008

“...Many labels claim “Remastered!” only to disappoint... Here, the refurbishing could not be more obvious...”

The 2008 version of *Univers Zero*...is radically remixed. The stereo effects that pervade the original CD version from 1989 are gone, in favor of ...sound more akin to...performing live. ...the many interwoven lines of counterpoint are now much more discernible...

The disc is augmented by a live version of “Faulx,” ...alternately meditative and explosive, hinting at the visceralgia to come in Roger Trigaux's offshoot band Present. A shocker that nicely complements the disc's myriad subtle surprises.”

– Marc Medwin, *Dusted*, Jun. 6, 2008, www.dustedmagazine.com

“...*Univers Zero* is a Faustian saga (like the drama, not the band) which plays like a symphonic tour of a Bosch painting. At times it's as taut and controlled as a Carl Stalling Looney Tunes dub, at others as free and chaotic as a Transylvanian peyote orgy.

So what is this exactly? ...

Stravinsky and twentieth century classical composers like Bartók, Ives, Penderecki, and Huybrechts proved some of the band's most distinguishing influences, along with ...the similarly apocalyptic Magma...

Univers Zero, along with...Rock in Opposition peers Henry Cow and Mothers of Invention, forged a genre of music that might appropriately be dubbed post-rock, had the term not been coined 15 years too late. ...the Belgians' craft at calculated pomp and nervous precision make Godspeed You! Black Emperor's apocalyptic grandiosity seem like a Michael Bay movie in comparison. In fact, it's a wonder sick minds from Kenneth Anger to Lucio Fulci never offered Univers Zero a film score. Maybe that's because for all of its cinematic and theatrical potential, this is sure-fire listening music... Each song is its own instrumental narrative, puzzle, and invective rolled into one. ...[Rating 8/10]”

– Timothy Gabriele, *PopMatters*, September 8th, 2008, www.popmatters.com

“Dark, brooding, menacing, and unwilling to fit into any genre, that's historically been the best way to describe the music of Belgium's Univers Zero. ...Cuneiform...once again remind us just how important this album really is. Sure, other acts like Frank Zappa, Gentle Giant, Henry Cow, King Crimson, Bela Bartok, Can, and Magma were also pushing the envelope into dark territories as well at the time, but none were able to conjure up such seething menace as Univers Zero. ...

... The weaving bassoon, violin, viola, and harmonium melodies are quite unique, and way ahead of its time...

If you've never taken the dark journey into the world of Univers Zero, start here and work your way up. ...you'll be glad you took that first step. [4.5 stars out of 5]”

– Pete Pardo, *Sea of Tranquility*, www.seaoftranquility.org, July 21st, 2008

“Univers Zero take their cues from 20th century classical music and then amp it up with rock sensibility. ...we're not talking Emerson, Lake and Palmer-style Cheez Whiz here. UZ's almost entirely acoustic sound blurs genre boundaries much more effectively than most any conventional rock band's efforts to set already bombastic Romantic-period classical music to a thumping backbeat. ...

..If only Denis wasn't pigeonholed as a rock drummer, I could see him leading his group at the [Library of Congress'] Coolidge Auditorium just as well as I could see him at the Velvet Lounge. That's a testament to how well, and how seamlessly, Univers Zero melds intellectual Western classical music with visceral rock.”

– Brandon Wu, “Label Spotlight: Univers Zero on Cuneiform”, *Washington City Paper: Black Plastic Blogs*, Aug. 1, 2008, washingtoncitypaper.com

“Despite occasional stylistic links, Univers Zero always spoke (and continues to speak) with its own voice. This welcome reissue confirms, once again, that in 1977 a nearly unheard-of group was creating a new kind of chamber music that, in its inclusion of rock instrumentation and the occasional rock stance, would be a blueprint for classical music of the 21st century.”

– John Kelman, *All About Jazz*

UNIVERS ZERO LIVE CUNEIFORM 2006

This album features: **Daniel Denis** [drums, percussion], **Michel Berckmans** [oboe, English horn, bassoon, melodica], **Kurt Budé** [clarinet, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone], **Martin Lauwers** [violin], **Eric Plantain** [electric bass], and **Peter Van Den Bergh** [keyboards].

“... this new live disc is simply the most revitalizing rejuvenating UZ experience I've had in years.

...I had certainly never associated raw unadulterated improv with the fastidious compositions for which UZ is deservedly respected... The live disc, recorded in June of last year, captures a band whose ability to stretch out meshes perfectly with astonishing precision. ...

Apart from monster playing and arrangements, the recorded sound could not be better. It's immediate and lush, detailed and unified, giving free reign to timbre without sacrificing the clarity of any formal or structural concerns. Cuneiform deserves thanks and congratulations, both for this document and for its long championing of a band that I was afraid had lost its relevance.”

– Marc Medwin, *Dusted*, February 13, 2006

"This is arguably the most high-octane release ever for Univers Zero, a band that now has ten CDs to its credit and a history stretching back to the mid-'70s. ...*Live* is an indispensable release for anyone who believes that "Bartók" and "rock" can fit comfortably in the same sentence. [Rating: 4 & 1/2 out of 5 stars!]"

– Dave Lynch, *All Music Guide*

“...This is as good as it gets folks, a live album from six superb musicians, playing music that is so far removed from mainstream culture, yet so accessible and enjoyable to anyone willing to give their complex yet rich style a chance. Highly, highly recommended! ... [5 stars]” – Pete Pardo, *Sea of Tranquility*, February 17th 2006

“[4 stars] ...Univers Zero...play all original music which partakes of Pink Floyd-type spacey rock, avant new music techniques, soundtrack scores and fusion jazz, among other things... How come I hadn't heard of them before this?”

– John Henry, *Audiophile Audition*, February 13, 2006

“... At the time punk rock conquered the world, a bunch of Belgian musicians invented their very own musical universe that after all those years still is far from outdated...Univers Zero speaks first of all with a very original voice... for those who cannot visit their concerts let this new CD be a proof that Univers Zero still is a very hot band.”

– Dolf Mulder, *Vital Weekly*, No. 518, Week 12

“... Univers Zero's importance in the history of modern chamber music is once again confirmed by this, one of their overall best albums...”

– Massimo Ricci, *Touching Extremes*, April 2006

“It is amazing to be able to hear a band like this in our times...Absolutely recommendable for fans of instrumental progressive, avant garde and experimental rock and fusion.”

– Koldo Barroso, *Intuitive Music*, March 1st, 2006

“Belgian Rock-In-Opposition acolytes Univers Zero...encapsulate its sound and climactically centered tactics on this wondrously recorded live set. ... Spanning three decades, the sextet's horns-strings-keys-rhythms makeup is largely about melodic overtones coupled with driving pulses and complex time signatures. The sextet blends a radical approach to familiar progressive-rock musings with horns and strings that occasionally drive the rhythmic pulses with booming unison lines. There are gentle moments...delicate chamber passages with ethereal treatments. No doubt, this newly issued disc will stand as one of the ensemble's finest recorded documents to date.”

– Glenn Astarita, “March 2006,” *All About Jazz*

UNIVERS ZERO IMPLOSION CUNEIFORM 2004

This album features: **Michael Berckmans** [oboe, english horn, bassoon], **Serge Bertocchi** [alto, soprano, sopranissimo saxes, tubax], **Ariane De Bievre** [flute, piccolo], **Aurelia Boven** [cello], **Daniel Denis** [drums, percussion, all keyboards, samplers], **Dirk Descheemaeker** [clarinet, bass clarinet], **Bart Maris** [trumpet, flugelhorn], **Eric Platain** [bass], **Christophe Pons** [acoustic guitar], **Bart Quartier** [marimba, glockenspiel], and **Igor Semenoff** [violin]

“... *Implosion* is a highly enjoyable and mature work from these master musicians, and a true progression of sorts for the band. ... Highly recommended! Score: 4/1/2 stars”

– Pete Pardo, *Sea Of Tranquility*, June 21st 2004

“...Univers Zero returns almost entirely to their acoustic roots ...with a refined and tempered equivalent of the relentless, prolonged gloom of early releases such as *1313* and *Heresie*. ... Univers Zero's excellence lies in its continuing ability to synthesize medieval forms, instrumental prog rock and modern classical dissonance with a splash of jazz and a taste for the suggestively macabre. The group continues to produce creative, highly inventive music, and plays it with precision and panache. Highly recommended for the adventurous listener. [Rating: 4/5 stars]”

– Bill Tilland, *All Music Guide*

“The ongoing musical adventures of Daniel Denis continue forward into new territory with *Implosion*... It’s easily one of the top ten recordings and performances for this year.”
– Jeff Melton, Roundtable Review, *Exposé*, #30, September 2004

“This CD...features 49 minutes of dark-side electrified chamber music. ...Univers Zero exists as a celebration of all that’s unsettling and unnerving... a reaffirmation that everything is just an inch away from collapse (or implosion). ... Belgian band Univers Zero has been producing dark-side chamber music for thirty years, and “*Implosion*” shows that they’ve not lost their focus or fire.”
– Matt Howarth, *Sonic Curiosity*

“Lots of new directions here: Univers Zero have opened the doors to a more linear, almost elegiac juxtapositions of influences, yet they still hold on to their basic personality. “*Implosion*” optimizes the cohesion of the scores into an utmost gratification for the hearing... theirs is a path no other group will be able to walk on with the same intensity.”
– Massimo Ricci, *Touching Extremes*, Aug. 8, 2004

“The band is...known for their monolithic, extraordinarily dark and moody brand of instrumental rock; but more and more they have been ditching the creepy horror-movie atmospheres in favor of more dynamic electrified chamber music sound. The evolution is most clearly evident in *Implosion*... easily my favorite of 21st-century Univers Zero. Compared to previous efforts, it’s practically cheerful’ while some of the interludes are ominous noise experiments...the compositions proper are surprisingly – and addictively – melodic. ...Denis’ compositions have never been tighter...and the expanded instrumental palette already evident in *Rhythmix* is used to even better effect here. ... this is the most accessible UZ yet, and not at the expense of depth. ... Univers Zero is still a juggernaut of a band. *Implosion* is their best effort since those good old days.”
– Brandon Wu, *Ground and Sky*

“...Today three decades later Denis continues to push the boundaries of music, crafting challenging and yet ultimately satisfying musical compositions. ...*Implosion*...in many respects continues their relentless quest in creating dark and moody atmospheric pieces that on one hand summon images of gothic horror...and on the other play off spacious, almost funky rhythm... Univers Zero never cease to challenge the listener one moment, startle the next and still exude a satisfying smile at the musicianship. ...They’re magicians at utilizing musical space Listening to *The Hard Quest* and the new *Implosion* have broadened my musical appreciation skills in ways I could never have imagined.”
– Jerry Lucky, *Ghostland.com*, Oct. 12, 2004

UNIVERS ZERO RHYTHMIX CUNEIFORM 2002

This album features: Michael Berckmans [oboe, english horn, basson, voice, glass, gong, belltree], Aurelia Boven [cello], Ariane De Bievre [flute and piccolo], Daniel Denis [drums, percussion, keyboards and harmonium], Dirk Descheemaeker [bass clarinet]. Bart Maris [trumpet], Eric Platain [bass], Christophe Pons [acoustic guitar], Bart Quartier [marimba, glockenspiel], and Louison Renault [accordion]

“Univers Zero may be the best band you have never heard... The more you know about modern “classical” music, the more you will appreciate Univers Zero’s references: to Stravinsky, the French Impressionists, and the twelve-tonal or atonal music which dominated much of the twentieth century. Their rhythms, drumming, use of electric guitars and short pieces are definitely rock oriented, but they add in instruments characteristic of classical music which are rarely if ever used in rock: woodwinds, harpsichords, cello, marimba, glockenspiel...Their musical vision is unremittingly ironic, full of deliberately sour passages, black humor, industrial evocations, and surrealist fantasies...listening to Univers Zero is a glimpse of something very special, out beyond our familiar shores.”
– Hannah M.G. Shapiro, *Eclectic Earwig Reviews*

“This sublime CD’s one of the prime exemplars of the fact that... progressive music’s long held hidden some of the finest neoclassical works available... With this work, UZ indisputably pushes effortlessly into the front ranks.Denis was superb before, he’s unbelievable now. One of the decade’s masterworks, in any genre.”
– Marc Tucker, *Exposé*, #25, August 2002

“Earlier this year I wrote about ‘*Crawling Wind*’ ..their latest release...[is] in the same unique dark style and with the same imaginative mix of instruments. ...The album begins with a bright, loud, rock-type number called *Terres Noires* with Celtic and French influences. ...A timpani solo with percussive effects turns into a troubadour number – a track that could almost be early music, and this is followed by *The Invisible Light*... with a beautiful oboe solo from Michel Berckmans ... The CD... finishes with a tiny repeat of *Reve Cyclique*, fading back in for just a few seconds, and then out again – presumably to send us away with the sound of that cyclic dream, tumbling on through the cosmos...”
– Keith Bramich, *Music & Vision: The world’s first daily classical music magazine*

“...daring, contemporary, strangely melodious and attractive. To be explored, undoubtedly, by all who fear not the challenges of the art.”
– Luis Loureiro, *Progressive Rock Portugal*

“...the feel of a conceptual opus is achieved. ...The results are...an excellent rewarding album, full of variety and invention, in fact a veritable feast for the “twist and turn” fanatic, and one that is both familiar and fresh. There are old themes, and also unheard diversions, sounding like classic *Between* at one point, almost *Henry Cow* at another. It’s not so dark as some, yet I’d almost guarantee that fans of this Zeuhl/RIO hybrid form should not be disappointed.”
– Alan Freeman, *Audion*, #46, Summer 2002

“...Denis surges onward with an extended ensemble. ...the chamber and goth feel presides but the added instrumentation offers a polytonal outlook, comprised of a multi-layered slant. They pursue darkly hued textures amid weaving chamber-like passages and melodically-tinged themes. ...There’s a whole lot of goodness going on... The musicians instill a sense of urgency and motion throughout, whereas the album title effectively suggests a rhythmic matrix! Either way, this recording marks a significant milestone for this time-honored aggregation! (Zealously recommended.)”
– Glenn Astarita, *All About Jazz*, Aug 2002

“To get a picture of UZ’s sound, imagine if in the middle of their *Red* or *Starless* and *Bible Black* phase, King Crimson was transported back to medieval times and had to play their music with period instruments. ... The music is so complex, so tightly played, that it is obvious each note from the ensemble was meticulously crafted and placed by Denis, yet it rounds a compositional turn, paradoxically carrying the feel of avant-garde freeform improvisation. With this musical strategy, Univers Zero offers a continuous stream of delightful listening surprises from each of the CD’s 13 compositions through many, many plays.”
– Michael Hopkins, *The Scene Online*

UNIVERS ZERO **THE HARD QUEST** **CUNEIFORM** **1999**

This album features: **Michel Berckmans** [bassoon, oboe, english horn, melodica, piano], **Daniel Denis** [drums, keyboards, percussion, melodica, voice], **Igor Semenov** [violin], **Dirk Descheemaeker** [clarinet, bass clarinet], and **Reginald Trigaux** [electric bass, voice and acoustic guitar]

"The Hard Quest...is an important event... Those stumbling into their gothiky universe for the first time may find their compositions... involve a studious unraveling of classical rock themes, where not a chink of improvised light is allowed into the group's creative chamber. Once your ears become accustomed to the gloom, though, Univers Zero's music can be blindingly illuminating."
– Edwin Pouncey, *The Wire*, #190-91, Jan. 2000

"The fall of Rome? The parting of the Red Sea? What else can compare with the monumental occurrence (after 12 years!) of a new slab of Univers Zero?... The Hard Quest is a masterwork!...this CD will take top position on my Best-of-'99 list at year's end."
– Mike Ezzo (roundtable review), *Exposé*, Nov. 1999

"Dark, complex, and full of compositional fury, the latest release from the legendary "chamber rock" band will surely be remembered as one of the best albums this year...are filled with all the dark splendor and rich arrangements that this venerable outfit is known for. If Stravinsky were alive today, he'd be in a band like this one."
– James Bickers, *Leo Magazine*, v.9, #45, Oct. 13, 1999

"Brilliant comeback album by an important avant garde band." – Louis Behiels, *Crohinga Well*, Oct. 2000

"The Hard Quest' is as much classical music as rock... The overall sound is quite dark and ominous, the imagery gothic. Always atmospheric, the feeling is of a relaxed Enid meeting American minimalist John Adams... In the broad spectrum of what progressive music should be, this is cutting edge... Excellent."
– Bernard Law, *Wondrous Stories*, #94, Nov. 1999

"...my admiration for Univers Zero was total because they seemed to be able to conjure that awful sense of existential dread we enjoyed from King Crimson...but...did not require electric instruments and Marshall speaker cabinets to do it. ...The secret was musical architecture and selection of weapons...After 5 records that never let a fan down...here's a new CD, once again a solid, brilliantly ugly addition to the band's C.V. ...turn it up! ... the Univers Zero franchise is alive and well in Denis' capable hands...Welcome back, messieurs, we did miss you."
– Frank Wertheim, *Tone Clusters*, #74, 12/1999

"With vice-grip concentration and unnerving audacity, this Belgian quintet offers the forbidden fruit of classical music by performing diabolic dervishes, sabre dances, and tantalizing tangos... And while ensembles like the Kronos and Brodsky quartets have filtered into the rock world by way of guest appearances or loosely adapting rock music, Univers Zero have been single-handedly bridging the two disparate worlds by integrating a frontline rhythm section into their dark scores. And what a powerhouse pulse machine it is... The theme music for horror films from the likes of Dario Argento may be the closest links, yet Univers Zero are wise to the ways and minimalist means of Reich, Riley and Glass (and most the of the 20th century's finest composers.) ...their music has a mystery and a power that's yet to be discovered by the outer stretches of goth and gloom lovers. Daring and delightful."
– Virginia Reed, *Focus*, Oct 14-27

UNIVERS ZERO **HEATWAVE** **CUNEIFORM** **1987**

This album features: **Daniel Denis** [drums, percussion, voice], **Michel Delory** [guitar], **Dirk Descheemaeker** [clarinet, bass clarinet, soprano sax], **Christian Genet** [bass, nailsake], **Patrick Hanappier** [violin, viola], **Andy Kirk** [piano, synthesizer, voice], **Jean-Luc Plouvier** [piano, synthesizer, voice]

"Heatwave ... is an intricate and monumental piece of work...Univers Zero play the most complex, rehearsal-intensive music since the heyday of progressive rock...The band remains as morbid as ever... Univers Zero, without any overt politics, stick to an extreme program: mulling over the choice between survival (for whatever it's worth) or destruction (that's all, folks) as close as music can capture it." – Michael Bloom, *Boston Phoenix*, 8/21/87

"...the band sounds much like a mating of Stravinsky, Bartok, the Art Bears, mid-period King Crimson, and Anthony Davis' Episteme. Throughout their existence, Zero has played this highly uplifting material with an ear for stunning orchestration."
– Russ Summers, *Option*, Nov/Dec 1987

"I've been salivating over the very thought of this record ever since I received word of its imminent release. When it arrived, it proved to be every bit as good and then some...For fans, Heatwave is a must; for the uninitiated, it is a superb introduction to the music of Univers Zero."
– Dean Suzuki, *Ear Magazine*, 2/88

"Univers Zero take the rock/chamber music foundation laid by Henry Cow in the early '70s and build upon it...the instrumentalists' adherence to classical technique precludes categorization as fusion...Challenging, but never difficult, aggressive, but never abrasive, Heatwave is a complex, densely textured, and electrifying work of art."
– Michael Draine, *Sound Choice*, #10

"Hard to say exactly what tradition the extraordinary LP arises out of. Some of the odd-meter riffs on electric guitar and trap set are reminiscent of mid-'70s British progressive work by Gentle Giant and others, but the kaleidoscopic development of the phrases through meticulous orchestration is almost Stravinskian, the willingness to repeat simple material is a tip of the hat to minimalism, and some of the sounds throughout might have been borrowed from the Residents. The mood is dark and intense throughout...a tightly controlled developmental logic is always at work... A must for lovers of adventurous music."
– J.A., *Keyboard Magazine*, Oct. 1987

UNIVERS ZERO **UZED** **CUNEIFORM** **CRYONIC 1984; REISSUED 1989 BY CUNEIFORM**

This album features: **Daniel Denis** [drums, percussion, synthesizer], **Dirk Descheemaeker** [soprano sax, clarinet, bass clarinet], **Christian Genet** [bass, balafon, bowed Guitar, tapes, whistle], **André Mergen** [cello, alto sax, voice], **Jean-Luc Plouvier** [electric and acoustic pianos, synthesizer, piano strings, percussion], **Michel Delory** [guitar] and **Marc Verbist** [violin] on "Célesta"

"...one of the most important groups of the 1980s ...dense, desperate and dark; nevertheless, the music of UZ is above all beautiful and dramatic, strongly marked by the cultural traditions of Europe...UZED is a rare, intense, and magnanimous piece of work, and it is absolutely compulsory for

everyone who's had enough of the monotony of Laibach, who's played their Magma records to shreds, and/or who would have wanted there to be a bit more electric bass and drums on Bartok's string quartets." – Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Puls* (Norway), Feb 1989

"Univers Zero is a showcase for the compositions of percussionist Daniel Denis. ...One thing that separates these artists' work from the work of more conventional composers is the absence of filler....we're not sure where Cuneiform Records is finding this stuff, but we hope they reach some sort of audience with it." – J.A., *Keyboard*, May 1989

"This is not polite chamber music... but an intense, often violent sound that writhes with a sinister energy...The opening "Presage" may remind listeners of King Crimson's "Larks' Tongues in Aspic" series, but...Univers Zero's musical vision is truly dark, lacking the romanticism that hides withing Robert Fripp's compositions...Not music for the faint of heart, which is probably as a good a definition of rock 'n' roll as any." – Michael Dawson, *Goldmine*, 1/13/89

"an inventive quintet who never fail to impress with their jagged time lapsed piano, dramatic time signatures, bass, reeds, deep cello and busy drums. The music drives along moonless avenues, soundtracks to a world beyond tomorrow." – *Outlet* (UK), #36

UNIVERS ZERO CRAWLING WIND 1983 BY EASTERN WORKS/RER, REISSUED 2001 BY CUNEIFORM

This album features: **Daniel Denis** [drums, percussion, voice, harmonium, violin, piano], **Michel Berckmans** [oboe, bassoon], **Dirk Descheemaker** [clarinet, bass clarinet, casio], **Andy Kirk** [harmonium, organ, voice, piano, synth, viola, music box, percussion, radio], **Guy Segers** [bass, voice, violin, insible talk, flies talk], **Alan Ward** [violin], **Christian Genet** [bass], **Patrick Hanappier** [viola], **André Mergenthaler** [cello], **Jean-Luc Plouvier** [keyboards], **Guy Segers** [percussion], **Roger Trigaux** [guitar]

"... Univers Zero are beside Magma and Faust [as] one of the most influential European continental groups of so called intellectual rock. Their influence can be heard from the numbers of newer European groups like Maximalist, Pako Alto and Cro Magnon to American Birdsongs Of The Mesozoic and Miriodor." – Stanislav Kovac, *Muska Magazine*, #5, Nov. 2001

"... Cerebral, complex and rewarding, this is a welcome reminder of the no-boundaries approach that informed the very best of the genuinely experimental bands that sprang up under the early-70s progressive rock banner." – John Sturdy, *Record Collector*, #269, January 2002

"The path of innovation and brilliance. It is a treacherous trail upon which precious few dare to tread... Crawling Wind is testimony to the courage of this Belgian unit, and to the many reasons why its music is one of the most important luminaries of sheer artistic creativity in modern times." – Marcelo Silveyra, *ProgFreaks*

UNIVERS ZERO CEUX DU DEHORS RECOMMENDED/RER 1981, CUNEIFORM REISSUE 1992

This album features: **Jean Luc Aime** [viola, violin], **Michel Berckmans** [bassoon, oboe, english horn], **Daniel Denis** [drums, percussion, voice, harmonium], **Patrick Hanappier** [viola, violin], **Andy Kirk** [harmonium, organ, voice, piano, Yamaha CP70], **Guy Segers** [bass, clarinet, voice], and Guests: **Jean Debeve** [hurdy-gurdy], **Ilona Chale** [voice], **Thierry Zaboitzeff** [cello]

"If Stravinsky had a rock band, it would sound like this. Blazing, white hot, medieval." – C.W. Vrtacek, *Advocate Newspapers*, 1/28/93

"...a dark record, utilizing the triple-fusion approach of the Rock-in-Opposition sound (jazz, rock and classical avant-garde), with the classical influence being the most dominant. The tense and brooding influence of the baroque school is felt on every track....The erratic rhythms created by the bass and percussion, as well as the complex arrangement provided by the exceptional composition, give this otherwise medieval sound its twentieth century flavor." – Michael C. Mahan, *Alternative Press*, #54, Dec. 1992

"...this is probably their most comprehensive catalog of horrors, from the ominous minimalist pedal points in "Combat" to the ghostly improvised droning of "La Musique d'Erich Zann"...to the grotesque bassoon/viola tradeoffs in "Bonjour Chez Vous." – Michael Bloom, *Boston Rock*, #133, July/Aug. 1993

UNIVERS ZERO HERESIE ATEM 1979, CUNEIFORM REISSUE 1991

This album features: **Michel Berckmans** [oboe, bassoon], **Daniel Denis** [drums, percussion], **Patrick Hanappier** [violin, viola], **Guy Segers** [bass, vocals], **Roger Trigaux** [guitar, piano, organ, harmonium]

"...as exemplified by Side One's "La Faulx," this is "Gothic Chamber music" at its best...by any standard, I hold this band in the highest esteem..." – Glenn Hammett, *Sounds Like*, #8

"Chamber music for the Apocalypse. This talented quintet finds the right balance between post-Schoenberg and postmodernism...a group of admirable, though dark, vision." – *Keyboard*, 5/92

"UNIVERS ZERO's music is sometimes defined as "gothic Chamber rock", and indeed its ominously dark atmospheres with growling voices and creeping drones will hurl you way back in the dark ages when the inquisition reached its most terrifying status. Intense fear licks from loud speakers, you hear kneecaps splinter, you feel pain screaming...absolutely not fit for children, young adults and musical lightweights..." – Ernst van Dinter, *Background*, 8/92

"Widely regarded as the darkest, most sinister album ever recorded, "Heresie" has earned a reputation which is somewhat exaggerated and misunderstood ...Not really as dark as it is usually perceived, "Heresie" is a passionate, expressive, purposeful, and important album." – Dan Casey, *Gibraltar*, v.4, #17

"...a dark and menacing listening experience... the closest comparison I could come up with is "The Devil's Triangle" on King Crimson's second album. Univers Zero are unsettling and uncompromising in their approach...the Gothic Governors. The instrumentation is used effectively in a sort of Armageddon chamber-music style, all topped off with some strange growled vocal effects. An intriguing and absorbing band..." – Mike Dillingham, *Ptolemaic Terrascope*, v. 3, #1