Memphis, 1960

In many ways, Memphis was *the* place to be for a musician in 1960. Sam Phillips' Sun Studios had been making the likes of Elvis, Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison and Jerry Lee Lewis household names, while further to the South, Stax records, then known as Satellite Records, was gearing up to bring the world a bold new sound that came to be known as Southern Soul or more simply R&B (for Rhythm and Blues). Renown artists such as Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, The Mar-Keys, Sam & Dave and countless others grew to prominence under Stax, while legendary session men like Steve Cropper, Donald "Duck" Dunn and Booker T. Jones grew to fame if not fortune working along side some of the biggest names in show business.

For the members of the Moho Memo, it must have been an ear-opening experience and a marked alternative to the cash-crazy jazz scene in New York where the pace of recording can be heard in the driving beat of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers or the unstoppable Jimmy Smith who, between the two of them, recorded 10 albums and several additional EPs on Blue Note in 1960 alone.

Memphis was not quite the daunting metropolis of New York in 1960. Musicians tend to find themselves in similar places at similar times making it a virtual certainty that there were cross influences between the artists who found themselves in Memphis then. It is unknown to what extent these famed session musicians contributed to the Moho Memo's sound either in casual conversation, a contribution of ideas, or techniques, or directly in recording work. Likewise, the appearance of members of the group on Stax records is a virtual certainty, although who, what, where and when exactly are sadly lost to time's indifferent passing.

It should also be noted that while their studio was allegedly mere blocks from the already legendary Sun Studios, there does not appear to have been much if any interaction between the group and the artists at Sun. It is possible that straight off a world tour with long nights in Shanghai and well versed in the traditions of the New York jazz scene, the ethos of the Sun sound was not exactly what the group had in mind. More to the point, it is unlikely that Col. Tom Parker or Sam Phillips saw much virtue in currying favor with a slew of art house madmen.

That being said, musicians of the time were less concerned with the divisions and definitions that their fans, managers and record labels often found favor in defending. The furor of Dylan eschewing his folk roots and "going electric" still lay some years off and the late night jam sessions that were the stock and trade of serious musicians cleaved to only one consequential criterion: can you cut it? While the after hours of the New York jazz scene had begun to show signs of its long love affair with technique and an almost athletic proficiency, other locales offered different flavors of favor, and that of Memphis held more than a passing, faddish allure.

The bar was not set higher or lower for the late nights in Memphis, but rather off to the side; this was indeed a strange place at a strange time. Listen closely to the guitar work of some of the country legends of the 1960s and you will discern the tell-tale traces of Bebop in their fast finger work. These were after all the best in the business and the business was making music, not making money. They knew it and the fierce pride behind their accomplishment was that of a craftsman and his abiding love of the tools, tricks and trade of ideas that defined the state of his craft.

These were not events of celebrity, the false bravado of wooing a crowd, or appealing to squealing teens, these were long nights of sweat, cigarette smoke and the passionate exchange of souls' sounds. Musicians at these sessions gave everything they had; if you didn't you weren't invited back. The reward for their hard work was paid out in the esteem of their fellow craftsmen and the rich wash of ideas and abilities that surrounded them while they worked. It was an existential pay-off, all about the experience. More than a few reputations were made during these hot nights, while others were broken or irreparably bent.

When the sun came up everybody in the room knew what was what. The world would never hear these amazing musical events; they were an inside job, for and by the knowing, and them only. There were no rules to these exchanges, but certain tacit understandings were strictly observed. You could bitch about your manager, flea-bag hotels, or the food in any city or town across the land, but if you mentioned record sales the room went quiet. That was Their world and you dared not bring it behind these doors. Similarly, no thought was given to recording these gatherings.

In marked contrast to these adventurous nights of aural exploration there was a culture of quiet surrounding them. They were not spoken of outside of the events, other than a passing word or two or knowing nod to a fellow practitioner. In fact, interviews with some of the attendees many years later showed them reluctant to cross that bridge of so many years' silence. Like all things Holy, it was understood that the less said about them the better. That truth has proved to be an enduring one, much to the frustration of those intent on discovering more about who, when, what and how.

This then was the backdrop of the Moho Memo's recording of *Houseboat Days*, a time and place as profoundly distinct from our modern methods of recording as can be fathomed. It has been said that every act of writing carries its own perspective, that when we read we try on a different mind, a different view of the world than our own. Similarly, every recording catches much more than the notes played, offering us a sonic document of a particular time, place and the energies that came together, if only for an eye blink under the impartial gaze of eternity. This then, was Memphis, 1960.