

Pharaoh

by Daniel Harris

Altodog was dressed in filthy chef's trousers and a long-sleeved purple dress shirt, somewhat dignified by a tattered black vest. A new beret sat rakishly on a tangle of brown hair. Altodog wore mismatched running shoes, no socks. A saxophone neck strap was his only ornament. His vintage alto saxophone slept in a black plastic trash bag slung over his left shoulder. His eyeglasses had only one lens.

Homeless, dirty and smelly, there was no way Altodog could enter the Greenwich Village jazz clubs or even the scurviest grease parlor. He was a familiar New York City street musician, playing his saxophone for change on street corners, subways and parks. Rods, a popular Village gay bar, would let him eat and crash for the night in exchange for after-hours cleanup.

On a foggy April evening, Altodog passed by the rear door of the Village Vanguard on Waverly Place. Pharaoh Sanders and the members of his band were standing on the sidewalk. They were on break. That was the era when Pharaoh wore three-piece suits. Altodog approached the jazz legend.

—Wazapinen? Altodog asked in his hip elided jazz delivery.

—Who are *you*? Sanders asked studying Altodog's dumpster *couture*.

—Altodog, he said, squinting through the one glass lens.

The band members sniggered.

—Easy brothers, Sanders shot back, I lived on the street back in the day.

—So Fey-roo, said Altodog, intentionally mispronouncing Pharaoh's name, you play the most far out, avant-garde jazz. Soooo, what's with the banker's threads? You're a jazzman, not a businessman.

—The listeners have to believe I'm for real. I have to look authoritative.

—Loan me a suit, brother, I'll blow your authority off the bandstand.

