Trouble Songs

Nobody Here but We in Trouble

One/Two/Three/Four, or birth/life/death/resurrection, as Kurt Stenzel has it on his score for Jodorowsky’s Dune, which is to say the soundtrack for the film about the troubled ’70s production of Alejandro Jodorowky’s filmic adaptation of Frank Herbert’s novel Dune.

Troubled, which is to say not completed, and later visited by David Lynch’s troubled 1984 version, which exists on celluloid.

Stenzel’s album a retro-synth curiosity fully formed, in formal contradistinction to his subject, or the subject of his subject (or milieu). Album scheme in the grain of classic themed sides, from the generic/common this side/that side to the iconic silver side/black side.

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18 written over and presumably into the music—etched onto each side and scheduled on the back of the album
19 as in hot mess, critical nadir, and perhaps hidden gem wrapped in gaud
21 As inscribed on Public Enemy’s It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back (1988), honoring the group’s legit and unofficial affiliation with the National Football League team the Los Angeles Raiders, a tip of the cap to its renegade image. The former-and-later Oakland Raiders were an L.A. franchise from 1982–94, during which time the organization’s reputation for assembling troubled players was very much a part of its Just Win, Baby ethos. In 2010, former N.W.A. MC Ice Cube directed a documentary for ESPN’s 30 for 30 series called “Straight Outta L.A.,” that explored the influence of Raiders ethos and iconography on hip-hop culture, in relation to the impact of the team’s move from Oakland to Los Angeles. As of this writing, after having failed to arrange a return to Los Angeles, Raider ownership (currently, reptilian Al Davis bowl-cut scion Mark Davis) is publicly contemplating a move to Las Vegas. Whether or not this fades into a PR blip, it is worth recalling for anyone who finds the whims of the Davis clan, and the larger cultural implications of the Raiders franchise, worth considering, even as the notion of a Las Vegas Raiders team conjures Elvis Presley (or Lady Gaga dressed as Elvis) in a sequined Raiders-themed jumpsuit, singing a medley of “Bring the Noise,” “Express Yourself,” and “Are You Ready for Some Football?”
How any four-sided thing might adopt the self-same scheme: BIRTH/LIFE/DEATH/RESURRECTION.

Just as any concept album is captive to its own pretense — a plot and a procession, a bunch of tracks.

We are all born, and we all rise, we live and die, not necessarily in that order. So the album can’t demand we listen in sequential sides (if its tracks are more fixed). And many show us as much, skipping mention on their labels, drawing eyes to sidelong run-off grooves.