BRIEF REVIEWS OF VOICE OF AMERICA
Rift 4

Bob Ostertag: tape recorders, analog synthesizer
Fred Frith: guitars
Phil Minton: voice

FRED FRITH/BOB OSTERTAG/PHIL MINTON:
Voice of America (Rift Records, 167 Ludlow St.,
NYC 10002) Voice of America is ironically titled
because the taped texts that provide the backdrop
for free improvisation are largely recordings of
Nicaraguan and Salvadoran revolutionaries, Sal-
vadoran National Guardsmen, and a recorded
description of the overthrow of the Chilean pres-
dent Allende. Side one is Frith (guitars, “home-
mades,” etc.) and Ostertag (synthesizers, tapes)
improvising with the taped material, and side 2
adds Minton’s highly versatile vocals. None of the
material and texts were discussed beforehand.

Voice is not a pleasant experience. Neither is
revolution, but it is often the only way to end
brutal oppression. This record effectively captures
the anger, chaos, and mayhem of armed rebellion.
Sounds scream, bounce off walls, sicken, and unh-
nerve. Snippets of “Let’s Make a Deal” and a
sportscaster’s commentary on the capture of the
Iranian hostages echo in the din, an unsettling
reminder of Imperialist culture. Side two climaxes
with Minton singing two verses of I.W.W. mem-
ber Ralph Chaplin’s song “Mourn Not the Dead”
(Mourn not the dead... rather mourn the apathetic
throng/The cowed and the meek/Who see the
world’s great anguish and its strife and dare not
speak!). The folk singer with guitar in hand singing
union and anti-nuclear songs is musically and
politically bankrupt, but I doubt experimental,
political recordings of this nature can replace the
antiquated folk singer. Voice, however, is quite
exhilarating and refreshing, and is certainly more
intriguing than the current slew of “political”
drive being recorded by many bands now. (It’s
also worth noting that Rift has kept its printing
and pressing costs down enough that only 600
copies need to be sold to break even, and still
provide attractive packaging and an insert. I
suggest writing Rift for details and advice).—Roger Kleier

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Fred Frith, using tapes, radio, and home-
made instruments as well as his guitar, joined
synthesist and musique concrete manipulator
Bob Ostertag at Public Access Synthesizer
Studio, NYC, in January ’81 to create a collage
from tapes of U.S. and Central American
broadcasts; vocalist Phil Minton participated
in their August ’81 concert in London with
similar intent. The metallic electronics speak
chillingly of torture and social tremors; the
tapes of Super Bowl coverage and Let’s Make
A Deal baldly propose the irrelevance of North
American cultural values to revolutionary situ-
tions in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Chile.
Programmatic, perhaps dogmatic, Voice Of
America would seem too obvious for critical
comment; were new music lovers more com-
mitted to political study than they seem to be.

MUSIC AND SOUND OUTPUT

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DOWN BEAT FEBRUARY 1984