

# Love on earth must be!

## Arthur Lee and *Forever Changes*

John Etherington

**A**RTHUR LEE FORMED the band that were to become known as Love, in Los Angeles in 1965. Inspired by The Rolling Stones and Byrds, Love's first album sounded like a cross between the two. Love were a mixed-race band, and recorded the song *Hey Joe* before Jimi Hendrix. Arthur has said that he gave Hendrix his first recording session, and also claims that he was the first black man to adopt the hippie look that Hendrix would use. In 1966, Love were the biggest band in LA, once the Byrds had moved on, and before the Doors rose to greater fame, the following year. Arthur was a striking figure in the 'sixties, and dressed to make an impact (Leo rising with Venus, ruler of the Midheaven, in Aries). For a while, he wore diamond-shaped shades with one red and one blue lens, carried fifty pounds of beads around his neck, and was infamous for walking around wearing one shoe! However, if Love's leader sought recognition, he also had a reclusive and more mysterious side (signified by his Sun-Mercury conjunction in Pisces, in the eighth house). It seems very apt that "King" Arthur should choose to live in a grand house known as "The Castle", formerly owned by famous horror-movie star Bela Lugosi. It is rumoured that Arthur normally only left the house to get laid or score drugs!

Arthur was born in Memphis to a black father (Chester Taylor) and a light-skinned mother (Agnes). His father, from whom he was separated early in life (natal Sun in the eighth opposing Jupiter; and Pluto, ruler of the I.C., in the twelfth), was a trumpeter. Arthur's parents underwent a divorce (natal Sun square Moon), and at the age of five he was uprooted and moved to Los Angeles. His mother remarried, and Arthur adopted the name of his stepfather, Clinton Lee. In his fifth year, Arthur experienced some challenging transits. These included Uranus conjunct natal Saturn, Pluto opposing natal Mars, Saturn opposing natal Sun, and Pluto conjunct Ascendant. He also had progressed Moon square natal Uranus, and progressed Mercury square natal Saturn. All of these configurations suggest the upheaval and insecurity that he may have experienced at the time. Incidentally, the name on his birth certificate is Arthur Porter Taylor. The Sabian symbol for his Midheaven at 13 degrees of Taurus is, appropriately, "a porter carrying heavy baggage"<sup>1</sup>.

According to Love's original lead-guitarist Johnny Echols, Arthur's mother "always wanted more out of him and he was not really that academically inclined.... He was, a lot of times, just punished basically by being made to stay in his room, so he was very introspective and would get inside himself"<sup>2</sup> (natal Sun in the eighth and Pluto in the twelfth).



Arthur started taking music lessons when he was aged ten or eleven, and made rapid progress. He never graduated from high school, because he was too set on a musical career. During the years of 1955-6, he had transiting Neptune opposing his natal Venus (both planets being associated with music), plus transiting Pluto trine his natal Venus. At school, he excelled in sports (natal Moon in Sagittarius in the fifth in trine to Venus in Aries in the ninth), most notably in basketball (angular Mars). According to Love member Bryan MacLean, Arthur was "known as the baddest guy on the West Side of LA, the 'Cassius Clay of the Streets'"<sup>3</sup>. Interestingly, Arthur Lee and Cassius Clay (Muhammed Ali) share the same Ascendant at 19 degrees of Leo.

Arthur's birth chart is a "splash" type, and has some noticeably Jupiterian features. There is a t-square with natal Sun conjunct Mercury in Pisces (traditionally ruled by Jupiter) opposing Jupiter, and Moon in Sagittarius (also ruled by Jupiter) at the apex. There is a lack of earth, with only Jupiter in Virgo, and Saturn in Cancer (both retrograde and in detriment). It seems that Arthur wanted to break free from all the constraints of the mundane world, and could not be fitted neatly into any form of categorisation. In his song 'The Red Telephone', he sings "If you want to count me, count me out"<sup>4</sup>. At the end of the song, he borrows the chant from the play *Marat/Sade* – "we're all normal and we want our freedom". As momentum builds, he yells "I want my freedom!"<sup>5</sup>. It was inevitable that when "people wearing frowns" were trying to "screw him down", Arthur would seek release through whatever means were possible, and often through drugs and alcohol (Jupiter conjunct Chiron and Neptune). His rebellious nature is shown by his natal Mars in Aquarius conjunct the Descendant, in trine to Uranus in Gemini in the tenth. Part of Arthur's great appeal was his outlaw or outsider image.

Arthur's natal Sun is in Pisces – a sign symbolised by two fish linked by a cord, but swimming in opposite directions. Reflecting on this symbol, I remembered the definition in my first astrology book, *The Modern Textbook of Astrology* by Margaret Hone. Re-reading this for the first time in years, I found much of her definition remarkably appropriate for Arthur. Hone says: [the fish symbol is] "representative of man's dual nature, his physical visible self and the hidden

reality behind that self... The Piscean almost invariably finds difficulty in life. He is pulled two ways and especially in his innermost unconscious self... The dual pull on a Piscean is responded to in a multiplicity of ways... therefore the sign confuses and hides its true meaning, which is consonant with its nature. Confronted with danger, the fish hides".<sup>6</sup>

In Arthur's chart four planets are in detriment – not only Jupiter and Saturn, as previously mentioned, but also Mercury in Pisces and Venus in Aries. Hence he made some unwise decisions, and sometimes had a tendency towards self-sabotage. When he first took his demos to Capitol Records, he gave them his second-best songs rather than his best (just in case they ripped him off). One day, when he had put hair-straightener on, he dozed off in a drugged stupor and awoke to find that he had all but destroyed the follicles on his scalp. From then on, he was prone to wearing rather ill-fitting wigs. Love's second album could have potentially been a greater success, if Arthur had not decided to put an eighteen-minute blues-jam on one side. Furthermore, at the height of their success, Arthur preferred to play in Los Angeles rather than travel elsewhere. Thus, he turned down an opportunity to play at the Monterey Pop festival.

Love were the first rock band to be signed to Elektra Records, and in 1966 made their first two albums *Love* and *Da Capo*. They had hit singles with 'My Little Red Book', and Arthur's 'Seven and Seven Is', which was arguably the first punk-rock song. During the year, transiting Saturn was making a conjunction to Arthur's natal Sun, while the transiting Uranus-Pluto conjunction opposed it. Arthur could be a "slippery fish". Hence, when he received the \$5000 advance for his first album, he went straight out and bought a car for \$4500, then gave the rest of the band a mere \$100 each. Arthur's financial extravagance is signified by his Jupiter-Chiron-Neptune conjunction in the second. Shrewdly, he also managed to negotiate a better financial deal with Elektra Records by persuading them that he had been under-age when he signed the original contract, which was therefore void. Another example of Arthur's trickster behaviour occurred when he did the final mix for Love's single 'Alone Again Or'. The song had been written by Bryan MacLean, who took lead vocals. However, Arthur changed the mix so that his own harmony vocals were heard louder than MacLean's, thus creating the impression that it was his own song. As it happens, the final mix turned out extremely well.



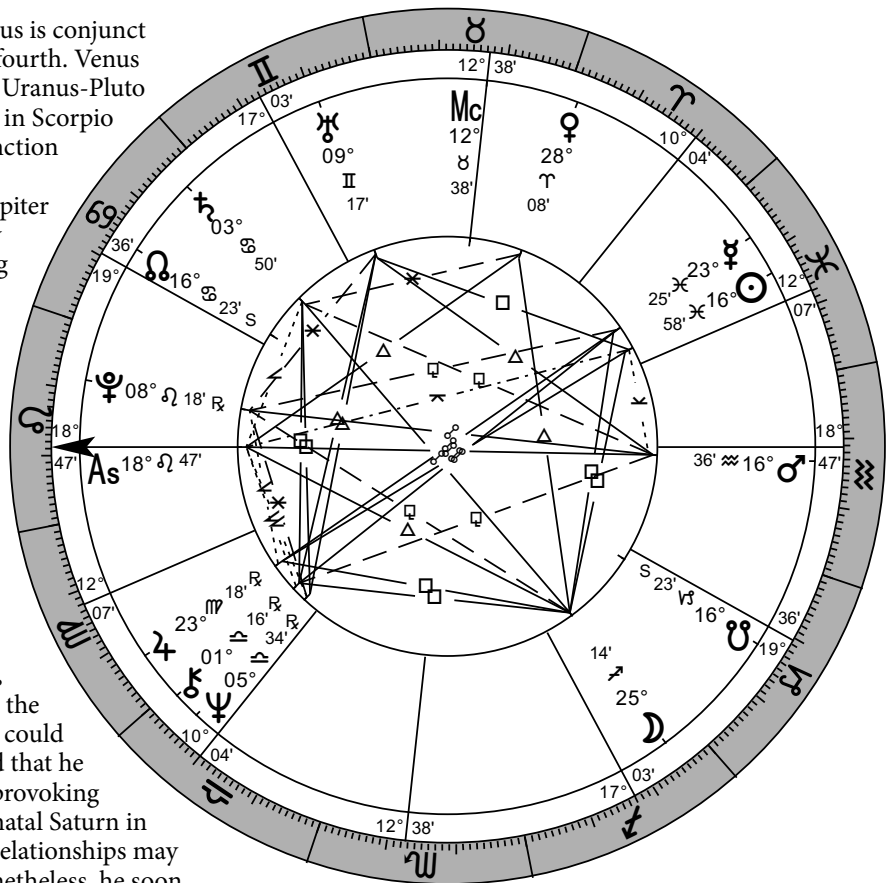
Love

In August of 1967, when Love were completing their third album, *Forever Changes*, Arthur had progressed Sun (the symbol of eternity/forever) in exact sextile to his natal Uranus (the planet of changes). Simultaneously, he had transiting Uranus conjunct natal Jupiter, and transiting Jupiter conjunct his Ascendant – aspects indicating a positive breakthrough and success. However, the album that was to be Love's masterpiece had a shaky start. In June, when the recording sessions began, various members of the band were allegedly hooked on heroin. The first sessions were so bad that the producer wanted to bring in session musicians. This threat gave the band a rude awakening, and they subsequently managed to get their act together. String and horn arrangements were then added to the album. By the time it was due for release, the so-called "Summer of Love" had come and gone. In October, some of the central characters of the San Francisco scene led a ritualised "Death of Hippie" march in Haight Ashbury. Ruthless dealers and harder drugs were in circulation, and things were starting to turn ugly. Also, the horrors of the Vietnam war were regularly being broadcast on TV. More bad news was to come when in April 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King was shot dead, and before the end of the year, the Manson murders would take place in the Hollywood Hills. Although *Forever Changes* is regarded as a classic of psychedelia, Arthur's lyrics were by no means the standard hippie "nursery rhymes". His songs express both beauty and menace; exuberance and paranoia. Allusions are made to the Vietnam war, the plight of the American Indian, and the Watts riots (in 1965, Arthur had watched the riots taking place from his hilltop house in LA). 'The Red Telephone' begins with "Sitting on hillside, watching all the people die/I'll feel much better on the other side/I believe in magic/Why, because it is so quick/I don't need power when I'm hypnotised/Look in my eyes".<sup>7</sup> Words such as these capture perfectly the vision of one with a Pisces Sun and Mercury in the eighth house.

In a small but erudite book on *Forever Changes*, author Andrew Hultkrans convincingly interprets some of Arthur's songs as having gnostic themes. Take the following: in 'Andmoreagain', he sings "and I'm wrapped in my armour, but my things are material/and I'm lost in confusions...",<sup>8</sup> and in 'Seven and Seven Is' (from *Da Capo*), "Through a crack of light I was unable to find my way/Trapped inside a night, but I'm a day..."<sup>9</sup> (eighth house Sun with Leo rising). It seems that with his natal Sun/Mercury-Jupiter opposition being so powerfully activated by the major transits of the time, Arthur was an open channel for words that were to be meaningful on more than one level. His words address not only the things in the world that need changing, but also the need for change in the individual. At the time of writing the lyrics, Arthur believed that he would die soon after. Thus, he intended 'You Set the Scene' (the last song on *Forever Changes*) to be his final statement to the world. In the song, he sings "Everything I see needs rearranging/and for anyone who thinks it's strange/Then you should be the first to want to make this change/and for everyone who thinks that life is just a game/Do you like the part you're playing?". In the face of potential death, the song has a positive thrust: "This is the time of life that I am living, and I face each day with a smile/For the time that I've been given's such a little while/and the things that I must do consist of more than style".<sup>10</sup>

*Forever Changes* was released in America on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1967. I have assumed the release time as 9:00 am (a possible opening time for stores in New York). This gives a rising degree of 11 Sagittarius, one degree away from the rising

degree of the Sibly chart for the U.S.A. Uranus is conjunct the Midheaven and opposing Saturn in the fourth. Venus (the planet of love) is at the midpoint of the Uranus-Pluto conjunction. The Sun-Mercury conjunction in Scorpio in the eleventh mirrors Arthur's own conjunction in the eighth, revealing his darker visions. Meanwhile, the Moon in Sagittarius trine Jupiter in Virgo (sign placements that are shared by Arthur) conveys the ultimately life-affirming message of the album. *Forever Changes* did not make a huge impact on the music world at the time of its release, and only gradually achieved its cult status. It is now recognised as a unique and timeless work. On the back cover of the original disc, there is a photo where Arthur is holding a broken vase. It has been suggested that this symbolically represented the end of both flower power and the original Love band. After they had made *Forever Changes*, Love disbanded because the various members were either moving in different directions, or were not in a fit state to continue. Natally, Arthur has natal Mars in Aquarius conjunct the seventh house cusp. It is well known that he could sometimes be difficult to get along with, and that he could act aggressively towards others, thus provoking hostility from them. Additionally, Arthur's natal Saturn in Cancer in the eleventh suggests that group relationships may not have been the easiest thing for him. Nonetheless, he soon formed another Love band, and in 1969 released the album *Four Sail*, which had a more "West Coast/soft-rock" feel.



**Arthur Lee: 7th March 1945, 16.40, Memphis, TN. Placidus Houses. Rating A (from Vindicator album sleeve (Lee))**



**Arthur Lee**

More band changes followed in the early 'seventies, along with Arthur's experimentation with both heavy rock and soul music. On his first solo album, *Vindicator*, he was clearly trying to connect with his black roots. The album was released in the summer of 1972, at the time of Arthur's Lunar return. Despite occasional concert appearances and recording sessions, little seemed to happen in Arthur's musical life for approximately twenty years. For some eleven years during this time, he had virtually no involvement in the music world, and apparently looked after his stepfather. Arthur made a surprising comeback in the mid-nineties, and eventually chose an "Indie" group called Baby Lemonade to be his new Love Band. Arthur's voice was still in good shape, and the band admirably reproduced his classic songs while adding new vitality to them. An even bigger surprise followed when it was announced that Arthur was facing a jail sentence. Allegedly, he had fired a gun when a neighbour complained that he was playing his music too loud (no one

was hurt). Despite a friend claiming responsibility for this, Arthur was found guilty and jailed for almost six years, as he already had previous convictions for two different offences. In 1996, transiting Saturn was opposing his natal Neptune and squaring his natal Saturn. Thus, one of the lines from a song on *Forever Changes* became strangely prophetic. In *Live and Let Live*, Arthur sings "You made my soul a cell".<sup>11</sup>

When Arthur was released from jail, on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2001, there were two major aspects symbolising his release. His progressed Moon was making an exact trine to his natal Jupiter, and transiting Jupiter was making an exact sextile to his natal Jupiter. Six weeks earlier, Arthur's progressed Sun had made an exact conjunction to his Midheaven, and subsequently he made an astonishing comeback, once again backed by Baby Lemonade. For one who didn't find self-discipline easy (weak Saturn and little earth), jail seemed to have done Arthur a lot of good. He looked not only healthy, but ten years younger. He also had a striking new image, and wore a bandana and cowboy hat along with his customary shades. Arthur returned to a hero's welcome. While in London, several MPs presented him with an EDM (early day motion) at the House of Commons. in recognition of his work! With his natal Mercury in Pisces opposing Jupiter, Arthur was prone to make some outrageously "over-the-top" statements. In an interview with Jack White published in January 2003, he said the following: "What I want to do right now is make the greatest album that I can possibly make and put on the best show that people will ever see. I'm taking my music somewhere else. I'm so bold as to say that I'm going to put *Forever Changes* out of people's minds with this new album that I have. It's the best rock album there's ever going to be"<sup>12</sup> and "I think I'm the best one of them all"<sup>13</sup> (rock-on Cassius Clay!). Not unsurprisingly, the album never

happened, but Arthur certainly put on one of the best shows that fans were ever likely to see.

During the next three years Love toured extensively, playing all of the classic songs. For the "Forever Changes" tour, their music was additionally enhanced by some excellent young Swedish musicians, called the Stockholm Strings 'n' Horns. Arthur had re-emerged as a great performer, and now gave full expression to his Leo Ascendant. It became apparent that despite his bad-boy image, he also had a sweet, humorous, and kindly side to his nature. He managed to win over a whole new generation with his music, which has as much relevance as ever (and especially with the war in Iraq taking place). However, during 2004, some of Arthur's old habits returned. Once again he fell out with his band, and formed a new one. Sadly, before they could perform live, Arthur was diagnosed with leukaemia. Shortly before his death, he married a long-term girlfriend, Diane. At the time of his passing, on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2005, he had transiting Neptune conjunct his natal Mars, transiting Pluto approaching his natal Moon, and transiting Uranus approaching his natal Sun. During his jail term, Arthur claimed to have heard the voice of God saying "Love on Earth Must Be"<sup>14</sup>. He has said that although he suspected that God might have something bigger in mind, he felt that the least he could do to help the process was to reform the Love Band. Hallelujah! From the nineteen Love-with-Arthur-Lee concerts that I attended, I can bear witness to the unfolding of the divine plan.

#### End notes

- 1 *An Astrological Mandala* (Dane Rudhyar) p.78. Vintage Books U.S. 1974 p.137.
- 2 *Forever Changes* (Andrew Hultkrans) Continuum, London, 2003 p.15.
- 3 *Arthur Lee* (Barney Hoskins) Mojo Books, p.14.
- 4 *Forever Changes*, Elektra, 1967
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *The Modern Text Book of Astrology* (Margaret Hone) L.N. Fowler & Co. Ltd, Romford, 1978.
- 7 *Forever Changes*, Elektra, 1967
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Da Capo*, Elektra 1966.
- 10 *Forever Changes*, Elektra, 1967
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *New Musical Express*, 11 January 2003.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *Love Story* DVD, Start, 2008.

Thanks also go to David Housden, editor of the indispensable fanzine *The Castle*.

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