

Bio information: **NATIONAL HEALTH**
Title: "**PLAYTIME**" (Cuneiform Rune 145)

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FILE UNDER: ROCK/FUSION

National Health was one of the last of the great "Canterbury-style" progressive rock bands. The band was formed in the fall of 1975 by keyboardists Alan Gowen [ex Gilgamesh] and Dave Stewart [ex Hatfield & The North], who wanted to create a large "rock orchestra" by combining personnel from their previous bands. National Health's initial, 7-piece line up featured bass, drums, vocals, dual keyboards, and dual guitar. But the band found that its large size contributed to problems in finding performance situations and generating interest in recording.

Alan Gowen left National Health in 1977. The band eventually whittled itself down into a more-standard line-up -- keyboards, guitar, bass and drums -- which recorded two albums, National Health (1977) and Of Queues And Cures (1978). Not long after the latter's recording, leader Dave Stewart also left the band. It then briefly experimented with other personnel.

In late 1978, Alan Gowen re-joined National Health. With a line up then consisting of Gowen, Phil Miller, John Greaves [bass & vocals] and Pip Pyle [drums], National Health found itself with instrumentation identical to that on Of Queues And Cures. However, it decided to go in a very different direction than when Dave Stewart was in the lead. The new National Health strove towards a more stretched-out, jam-based approach. As guitarist Phil Miller remembers it, "Basically, we did less writing and more playing."

Indeed, this version of National Health did more gigging than any other lineup of the band. It played all over Europe, and toured for nearly a month in the USA and Canada in late 1979. It was also the longest lasting, most stable version of the band. However, the quartet of Gowen, Miller, Greaves and Pyle never released any studio or live recordings. The band folded by March, 1980, with each of the members embarking on separate music projects.

Alan Gowen died of leukemia in May, 1981. Following his death, National Health briefly reunited for several gigs in honor of Gowen's memory, as well as a recording project before finally disbanding in 1983.

This CD, Playtime, is the first National Health live album to ever be released. It is also the only recorded documentation of the Gowen, Greaves, Miller, and Pyle version of the band -- and the only National Health release without Dave Stewart. Recorded at two different shows in 1979, the material on Playtime was edited, sequenced and mastered by Phil Miller and Pip Pyle in 2000 as a tribute to their late friend and bandmate, Alan Gowen. The majority of the compositions on Playtime cannot be found on any other National Health recordings. In addition, Playtime includes a 16 page booklet with liner notes by noted Canterbury expert Aymeric Leroy, which tells the story of the last period of National Health with Gowen. Illustrated with rare photos, it includes interviews and comments with all surviving members of the band.