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Wadada Leo Smith's Golden Quartet - Tabligh

today

features

reviews

charts

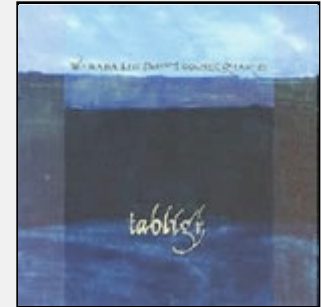
labels

writers

info

donate

## Dusted Reviews



**Artist:** Wadada Leo Smith's Golden Quartet

**Album:** Tabligh

**Label:** [Cuneiform](#)

**Review date:** Sep. 12, 2008

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### Wadada Leo Smith's Golden Quartet - "Caravan of Winter" (Tabligh)

Even after four decades, it seems that trumpeter/composer /conceptualist Wadada Leo Smith is missing his due acclaim. Pursuing a unique kind of pan-spirituality and a syncretic musical theory (Ankhrasmation), Smith has over time assembled a number of different units to explore specific aspects of his musical vision (among the many examples are the [Creative Construction Company](#), the [New Delta Akhri](#), and the [Silver Orchestra](#)). One of the longest is the Golden Quartet, even though its lineup continues to change. Anthony Davis' piano chair is now occupied by Vijay Iyer, and John Lindberg has taken over bass duties from the late, lamented Malachi Favors Maghostout while Shannon Jackson (where's he been?) gets behind in the wake of Jack DeJohnette.

On their first Cuneiform release, the group delivers a fierce live set at the 2005 CalArts festival. With Iyer playing Rhodes a lot, there's a strong electric Miles vibe in many places; no surprise, given Smith's longtime involvement with the electric Miles project [Yo Miles!](#) (along

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with guitarist Henry Kaiser). But while the music often sounds as if it's been warmed by Miles' lonely fire, it's distinctive and idiomatic despite the obvious influence. The reflective lyricism is phrased in tone-mangling keyboards, brass lightning bolts, and polymorphous rhythms that fuse harmolodic boogie with rubbery swing.

"Rosa Parks" seems to begin in the high atmosphere, nanoparticles and dust swirling provocatively, with Smith's lone trumpet cry seemingly the only definable presence in this musical cosmos. But then dirty Rhodes and some loose booty funk emerge to transform the piece into something wonderfully polyphonous, filled with collective soloing and with some truly memorable and expressive playing from Jackson. Speaking of the drummer, it's a sheer joy to listen to his skittery shuffle on "DeJohnette," which winningly abstracts the bustle of its dedicatee and opens up this slice of referential jazz and divides it among the quartet. Iyer switches to acoustic here, and after a probing trio with Lindberg and Shannon, he is alone with Smith, the piano sounding like melting ice while the trumpet wheezes and slurs alongside him. The relatively brief "Caravan of Winter" is in many ways a feature for the graceful, lyrical playing of Lindberg (whose small group recordings over the last decade have sometimes featured Smith). The 25-minute title track opens with further atmospheric swirling, though the majority of the piece seems to pay direct tribute to some specific moments from *Bitches Brew*. But again, this is not at the expense of the rich, provocative, and often thrilling group music these fellows make. It's a fantastic album, a reminder of the power of Smith's personality and of good small-group jazz.

By Jason Bivins

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