



Spiritual Dimensions

Wadada Leo Smith | Cuneiform Records

By Raul d'Gama Rose

Every note trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith blows on his exquisite brass instrument brings a whole world of joy. The sound of the Earth and the Heavens in every echo and ululation of the notes that flow out of his trumpet, dancing the interminable dance of lovers in unison, like sunrise and sunset, day and night. Each is an element of a cosmic double-helix intertwined and waltzing sensuously around each other.



Oh, the joy of *Spiritual Dimensions*, in the studio with the Golden Quintet on the first CD and in the live versions with octet and nonet groups on the second CD.

Listening to Smith's music is like being seduced by the hypnotic Sufi poetry of Rumi and--for that matter, the great Brazilian poet Manoel de Barros, who gave the world his magnum opus, *Gramática Expositiva do Chão* (*Poesia quase toda*) or *Descriptive Grammar of the Ground* (almost complete poems), that celebrated the spiritual wonders of nature in the in a decidedly concrete form. Both CDs in this magnificent twin package celebrate Smith's long-standing love for the spiritual and his dedication to doing his bit for an ordered, loving Earth through nothing less than notes that echo with iridescent and glacial splendor. And this seems to be his life's work.

On the first CD, the Golden Quintet meditates on the depths of the divine mystery through a series of songs. Each song is fraught with an ionic charge so energetic that it sparkles from note to note--especially in "Al-Shadhili's Litany of the Sea: Sunrise," a patient and organic development that seems to pulse on the rhythm of daybreak, and through "Umar at the Dome of the Rock, parts 1 & 2," which also sizzles with a myriad epiphany of the confluence of Earth and sky. "Crossing Sirat" is a sinister meditation of the terrors of the nether world that continue to interrupt the pristine celebration of human endeavor. The preponderance of bass and drums recalls the umbilical connection with the "African-ness" of nature.

The second CD is a live performance from April 2009. In his use of strings, broad echo and primordial wail, Smith takes his horn to a place he occupies in solitary splendor. This is a realm that Miles Davis began to inhabit in the years following his experiments with electronics until his death. Smith however uses minimal electronic interruptions. Rather, he maintains his explorations of spiritualism via extended performances in "Organic" and "Joy: Spiritual Fire: Joy," the latter climaxing in a kind of ecstatic Sufi dance. In a clever programmatic maneuver, Smith pays homage to Angela Davis, an unforgettable pioneer of Black Consciousness in an eponymous song. And there is a taut musical excursion in a live version of "South Central L.A. Kulture."

There is no mistaking the importance of this record--both in its live and studio incarnations. It is proof that the spiritualism of music did not die with John Coltrane, but rather lives on through the mystical horn of Wadada Leo Smith.

Track Listing: CD1: Al-Shadhili's Litany of the Sea: Sunrise; Pacifica; Umar at the Dome of the Rock, Parts 1 & 2; Crossing the Sirat; South Central L.A. Kulture. CD2: South Central L.A. Kulture; Angela Davis; Organic; Joy: The Spiritual Fire: Joy (In memory of Imam Warith Deen Mohammed).

Personnel: Wadada Leo Smith: trumpet; Vijay Iyer: piano, synthesizer

(CD1); John Lindberg: acoustic bass; Pheeroan AkLaff: drums; Don Moya: drums (CD1); Michael Gregory: electric guitar (CD2); Brandon Ross: electric guitar (CD2); Nels Cline: 6- and 12-string electric guitar (CD2); Lamar Smith: electric guitar: (CD2#1, CD2#4); Okkyung Lee: cello (CD2); Skuli Sverrisson: electric bass (CD2).

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