

EARTH PEOPLE

Simple ... Isn't It?? (Undivided Vision)

Reviewed by Chris Forbes



The global psychedelic jams live on! Earth People, the Staten Island based improvised music collective, shows in this follow-up disc to their strong initial offering, 2001's (Earth People), that they are a force to be reckoned with on the music scene. Earth People has a rotating ... and growing list of participants, but centers on the trio of Andre Martinez, guitarist Doug Principato and reedist Jason Candler. The collective continues their exploration of the world between free-jazz, seventies funk and world-beat grooves and continues to exhibit a devotion to the collective groove rather than traditional solos and virtuoso blowing.

Simple...Isn't It?? is a refinement on the band's earlier concept. The disc consists of four cuts, rather than the earlier disc's long jams.

Guitarist Principato's acoustic instrument is pushed more to the fore on this disc, particularly on the first two tracks. "Birthright", the first track, is introduced by Principato's acoustic, which coalesces into a lovely modal riff in 5/4. The track bears some relationship with the early seventies albums by Pharoah Sanders. The horn ensemble of Candler, Sabir Mateen and Karen Borca is less interested in conventional soloing and more about creating a hypnotic bed over which vocalist M can sing modal lines and chants. "Bojangles" begins with a funky riff from Principato and quickly becomes a freak out, before capturing a rather Miles Davis-ish funk groove about halfway through. "Simple...Isn't It?" is a pure New York energy jazz. Though the improvisation is collective, the dominant voice here is Mateen, whose altissimo register is a true wonder. The improvisation has dynamic contrasts and levels and some wonderful "inside the piano" effects from keyboardist Mark Hennen. The last track, "Breaking the Malaise," is a long atonal funk jam, beginning with a dark chromatic riff from the keyboard, supported by a strong bass line by Francois Grillot. Martinez' trap set work is particularly impressive. But at 18 minutes, the track loses some momentum. One longs for the contrasts that helped propel the funk track from the group's earlier disc along with the masterful modulations of tempo and sense of direction. It's a strong cut, but perhaps not as strong as the other parts of the album.

All in all, this is a strong sophomore effort for the band, perhaps because this really isn't a group of sophomores. With elder statesmen of free jazz like Sabir Mateen, and other members of the group like Martinez, who apprenticed for ten years under Cecil Taylor, this is a sensitive and accomplished ensemble, one possessed of an original and attractive concept. Could one dare to hope that the '00's will be known as the decade of Earth People? It may be a long shot, but there's not much better music that is coming out of New York currently.

[Pick this up at CDBaby, and www.earthpeople.tv]

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