

Reviewed by Jeff Morris

Either Orchestra
More Beautiful Than Death

Accurate
2000 Time: 74

Musicians: Tom Halter, Colin Fisher (trumpet & flugelhorn), Joel Yennior (trombone), Jaleel Shaw, Miguel Zenon (alto saxophone), Russ Gershon (tenor & soprano saxophones), Charlie Kohlhas (baritone saxophone), Dan Kaufman (piano, electric piano & organ), Rick McLaughlin, Atemu Aton (bass), Harvey Wirht (drums), Vicente Lebron (congas, bongos & percussion).

Songs: Amiak Abet Abet, Number Three, More Beautiful Than Death, Musicawi Silt, Breaktime for Dougo, All Those SOB's, Slow Mambo for J.J., Feker Aydelmwey, The Eighth Wonder.



Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

Following a seven-year recording hiatus, Russ Gershon and the Either Orchestra are back with *More Beautiful Than Death*. Don't let the morose title mislead you--the requisite brooding falls away soon enough, and what's left is a positively joyous, danceable set of what I suppose you could plunk under that dubious catch-all, 'world music.'

Three tunes that make up "The Ethiopian Suite" connect the record's dots, but it's the ease with which the band slips from their roaming polyrhythms and dense ensemble passages to the likes of the foot-draggin' blues of "All Those SOB's" or "Breaktime for Dougo"'s rousing township jive that's most impressive. The exclamation point here is "The Eighth Wonder," a simple, soul-jazz outing that harks back to late-sixties Cannonball Adderley, and then even further to Horace Silver. Dan Kaufman, who earlier made his mark with an able piano solo on "All Those SOB's," mans a Fender Rhodes here, calmly building to a funky fever.

More Beautiful Than Death does, however, lack balance between ensemble and individual. With some exceptions ("Slow Mambo for J.J.," for one, where Jaleel Shaw shows a gorgeous, wide tone on alto and a very hip sensibility) these fascinating soloists are almost totally superceded by the needs of an overbearing group. Gershon, a dryly efficient player with a great deal to say, fares better than the rest, navigating fleetly around the languid, brassy arrangement of the title cut, though his uninspired solo on "The Eighth Wonder" is a low point. Likewise, the added percussion (mostly thanks to Vicente Lebron, though augmented by Harvey Wirht's restlessness at the traps) adds little--it doesn't exactly distract much from the proceeding, but instead drowns them out.

And yet, it's simply not as bad as it sounds. *More Beautiful Than Death* is, on the whole, as striking as the gothic imagery conveyed by its title, and there is surely no other group quite like this one. Reservations aside, this is worth many hours on a CD changer.

JM

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