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## More Beautiful Than Death

The Either / Orchestra | Accurate

### Personnel:

Tom Halter, Colin Fisher, trumpet, flugelhorn; Joel Yennior, trombone; Jaleel Shaw, alto sax; Russ Gershon, tenor, soprano sax; Charlie Kohlase, baritone sax; Dan Kaufman, piano, Hammond B-3 organ; Rick McLaughlin, bass; Harvey Wirht, drums; Vicente Lebron, congas, bongos, percussion. On "Number Three," Miguel Zenon, alto sax, replaces Shaw; add Atemu Aton, bass.

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For those who appreciate big-band music that wanders from the beaten path but never far enough to exhaust one's patience, the Massachusetts-based Either / Orchestra is designed to please. There are no shopworn standards in its book; instead, the E / O takes the listener on a bracing musical journey from North American Jazz / blues / funk to Latin and Township Jazz / calypso all the way to Ethiopian pop songs of the '70s. Six of the nine selections on *More Beautiful Than Death*, the orchestra's first album since 1996, were written by leader / saxophonist Russ Gershon, the others by Teshone Sissay ("Amiak Abet Abet"), Girma Beyenet ("Musicawi Silt") and Ayalew Mesfin ("Feker Aydelmwey"). There's enough African, Latin and reggae-inspired music to beckon a wide audience, enough Jazz to placate the purists. The undermanned E / O (it's actually a tentet) has found a way to keep the music accessible without sacrificing its integrity: an arduous balancing act but one that can pay handsome dividends when performed correctly, as it is here. Although the label "new and improved" is nowhere to be seen, seven members of the orchestra (nine including alto Miguel Zenon and bassist Atemu Aton, who appear only on "Number Three") are making their E / O debut — Gershon, baritone saxophonist Charlie Kohlase and trumpeter Tom Halter are the only holdovers. Each of the newcomers makes a sharp impression, with keyboardist Dan Kaufman, drummer Harvey Wirht and percussionist Vicente Lebron especially engaging. Gershon is a clever writer who draws from a wide array of sources and knows how to keep a listener on his toes. The zestful "Breaktime for Dougo" summons to mind the Cuban ensemble Irakere at its best, whereas "Slow Mambo for JJ" (which engirds altoist Jaleel Shaw's most productive solo) is more akin to Tito Puente or even Perez Prado. Gershon's soprano brightens the scampering "Fel

Aydelmwey,” while Kohlase flexes his improvisational muscle on the dream-like “More Beautiful Than Death” and “Musicaw Silt” and Halter does likewise on “Amiak Abet Abet” and “All Those Sobs.” After four years away from the recording studio, the newly reinforced Either / Orchestra is more durable and dynamic than ever.

Track listing: Amiak Abet Abet; Number Three; More Beautiful Than Death; Musicaw Silt; Breaktime for Dougo; All Those Sobs; Slow Mambo for JJ; Feker Aydelmwey; The Eighth Won (73:56).

~ [Jack Bowers](#)

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