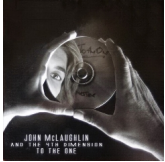


John McLaughlin – To The One (2010)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 12 April 2010 12:53 - Last Updated Saturday, 20 December 2014 22:36

John McLaughlin and The 4th Dimension – To The One (2010)



1. *Discovery*
2. *Special Beings*
3. *The Fine Line*
4. *Lost and Found*
5. *Recovery*
6. *To the One*

John McLaughlin: guitar (1-3, 5), guitar synthesizer (4, 6); Gary Husband: keyboards, drums (5, 6), additional drums (1, 3), additional percussion (1); Etienne M'Bappé: bass guitar; Mark Mondesir: drums (1-4), additional percussion (5).

As it says on the sleeve, as opposed to the tin: file under jazz/rock. These words, as well as the crackling electrified sounds that they invariably conjure up, are the devil itself for those who see jazz as a purely acoustic, swing-based art. But even they would have to concede that British guitarist McLaughlin is one musician who has brought grace as well as aggression to the vexed sub-genre.

If one accepts that jazz-rock was Miles Davis' early 70s bombshell baby then he, along with Joe Zawinul and Herbie Hancock, among others, was an invaluable midwife. Four decades on, McLaughlin is still playing with fire and finesse and his elder statesman status means that he can cherry pick talent when he assembles a band. The four-piece he leads here is notable for the presence of two powerhouse drummers, Mark Mondesir and Gary Husband (the latter also plays keys), though the real jewel of the sidemen is arguably Cameroonian bass guitarist Etienne Mbappé. His bubbling, percussive lines, seamless slides into double time and razor-sharp sub-divisions of the beat bring forth the sophisticated ruckus that is not so much jazz-rock as jazz that rocks.

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McLaughlin is highly effective when playing unison lines with Mbappé, no more so than the spiralling bebop-like melody of Recovery, which is squeezed into a few action-packed bars. These tactics are smartly deployed, but as flawless as the technique is on this set, what is missing is the one thing that has elevated McLaughlin above many of his peers – his lyricism or, as Zawinul's co-conspirator Wayne Shorter would put it, "the need to tell a story". Some of the arrangements are also a touch on the rigid side, with one too many songs breaking up their pulse just as a groove starts to cook.

On the plus side, the Pat Metheny-ish title-track uses a guitar-synthesiser deftly against Husband's intricate comping, but it's still hard to shake the feeling that this is a group that might have a great record in it rather than a group that will make a great record simply because it's a great group. ---Kevin le Gendre, BBC Review

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