Klaus Weiss Sextet - Sunbirds (1971)



1.Sunbirds 2.Sunshine 3.Kwaeli play 4.Spanish Sun 5.Blues For D.S. 6.Sunrise 7.Dreams 8.Fire Dance Ferdinand Povel (tenor sax, flute), Philip Catherine (guitar), Fritz Pauer (el-piano), Jimmy Woode (bass), Juan Romero (percussion), Klaus Weiss (drums).

Discovery is perhaps the single most pleasurable feature that awaits the prog enthusiast, similar perhaps to the wine lover who is in constant search for a new vintage, a fresh varietal to quench his thirst. Because of the vast array of sub genres, there is a seemingly limitless treasure trove of unknown albums that lie hidden barely beneath the sand, waiting to be unearthed. Such is the case with the multi-national Sunbirds, a gift from my pal Mellotron Storm who ignited my curiosity with his review (isn't that the real purpose of this site?) and the find is curiously attractive, as I am currently in a heavy jazz-rock-fusion mode (happens often in winter) with arrivals of the first 4 Nucleus albums and Isotope's Gary Boyle, all to be reviewed imminently. Just like with a sunken cache, the jewel is tarnished only by time and in fact, only glows brighter than ever before with each listen. The first comment remains concretely evident in that the early 70s were nothing more than a giant organic laboratory of experimentation with a huge arsenal of modern instruments for the time, electric piano, synths and treated electric guitars, all conspiring to alter the limits of jazz by providing a solid rock backbone. There is nothing more pleasing than the e-piano, the celebrated Fender Rhodes in particular and this debut has endless cascades of the glorious keyboard within its grooves, here played by Fritz Pauer . Belgian guitarist Phillip Catherine sizzles fiercely when called upon which is often and the delectable flute also has a predominant role. This is groove music par excellence, an all-instrumental blitz that powers forward with reptilian efficiency, urbane at some moments and galactically spacey at others. On "Sunshine", Catherine palpitates brilliantly within the confines of a sweltering mass of trippy notes, while on the scintillating "Kwaeli" the flute and bass enjoy a slow dance of loving embrace, as American jazz stalwart Jimmy Woode lays down a fierce bass furrow that burrows deeply into the psyche, the guitar hovering over the entity with bold confidence, sounding like much very early Santana. When the e-piano enters the fray, well?.wow! You have to marvel at the deft musicianship. That perceivable Latin flavor is proven by the "Spanish Sun" track, perhaps even the highlight piece here, sounding like some

soundtrack to a 70s American movie filmed in San Francisco, breezy, trippy, groovy and all the cool words used back then apply. The riffling rhythm guitar is simply superb, whilst the flute dances above the fray with manic delicacy, propelled by Klaus Weiss' spontaneous drumming. "Blues for D.S." just keeps glowing cheerfully, the bass and drums setting down a crawling groove on which the soloists can evoke sensational sequences of sounds that seeks out the most far-flung expanses without becoming cheesy. The rumbling organ does well in inspiring the simmering pot effect. "Sunrise" like the title suggests is vivacious, funky, playful and gently intense. The mood is super-cool and Catherine's playing style explains why he replaced Jan Akkerman in latter day Focus, loads of "flick o the wrist" riffs abound , rekindling images of the jam tracks off Focus "3" album. The finale is called "Fire Dance" and once again, the onus is on heat and shimmer, with the axe blasting forth with relish (and mustard!) , the groove shining bright and you can imagine the smile on the musicians faces as this simmers to an end. Incredible music .

Some may slimily claim that this is very dated and has no context by today's standards but we are dealing with an ancient musical artifact that is essentially timeless. Hey, Miles Davis, Mozart, Bach and countless others still thrill to the gills, so why not the Sunbirds? This is a tremendous recording that has a distinctive place in the prog heritage. Thanks, John via Greg Walker (networking works!). In terms of prog academia, if you ever wanted to get into an electric piano orgy, look no further! --- tszirmay, progarchives.com

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