Wayne Shorter - Odyssey to Iska (1971/2014)

01. Wind 02. Storm 03. Calm 04. De Pois Do Amor, O Vazio (After Love, Emptiness) 05. Joy Bass – Cecil McBee, Ron Carter Drums – Al Mouzon, Billy Hart Guitar – Gene Bertoncini Percussion, Drums – Frank Cuomo Tenor Saxophone, Soprano Saxophone – Wayne Shorter Vibraphone [Vibes], Marimba – Dave Friedman

On August 26, 1970, Wayne Shorter recorded two separate albums for Blue Note (the other one is Moto Grosso Feio), his final projects for the label. For this set, Shorter doubles on tenor and soprano, utilizing a double rhythm section comprised of vibraphonist Dave Friedman, guitarist Gene Bertoncini, both Ron Carter and Cecil McBee on basses, drummers Billy Hart and Alphonse Mouzon, and percussionist Frank Cuomo. On the verge of joining Weather Report (referred to in the liner notes as "Weather Forecast"), it is not surprising that Shorter's originals include titles such as "Wind," "Storm," and "Calm." These moody works were never covered by other jazz players but they work quite well in this context, launching melancholy flights by Shorter. ---Scott Yanow, Rovi

Exotic percussion-based proto-World Music worked for Wayne Shorter on Super Nova, so he tried it again the next year (1970) on Odyssey of Iska. The sound is very similar but the lineup completely different: here Wayne plays tenor and soprano; unlike Super Nova, where he stuck exclusively to soprano. Dave Friedman plays vibes and marimba; Gene Bertoncini, guitar; Ron Carter and Cecil McBee on bass; and there are three drummers: Billy Hart, Alphonse Mouzon, and Frank Cuomo.

The pieces are, with one exception, given one-word titles: "Wind," "Storm," "Calm," "Joy," and "De Pois do Amor, o Vazio (After Love, Emptiness)." So like Super Nova, there is one Brazilian tune among a lot of mood music (quieter mood here, for the most part). "Wind" is quieter than "Storm," which comes in with a guitar intro that flirts with rock and roll before resolving into something more rich and strange. Here Shorter doesn't play nearly as stormily as he does elsewhere. It is always tempting with music titled in this way to speculate on the relation of particular parts to the theme: does Shorter come in playing the role of the storm's eye? He leaves it to Friedman and the others to stir up most of the fuss, such as it is. For a man who went up 'gainst the wall with Coltrane, I would have expected more of a storm.

"Calm" is, well, you know. With the possible exception of "Storm," this album should carry a commendation from the FDA for truth in packaging: what you see on the label is what you get. Or is there a subtext for deconstructionists? On "Calm" Shorter does sound as if he has a certain sense of foreboding. Still, he stays within the wider parameters of the mood. "De Pois do Amor, o Vazio" sounds like "Calm—the Sequel" until about a minute in, when suddenly we're in a funky Rio dance hall. Bertoncini is competent, the backing dutiful. To my barbaric ears, however, Shorter sounds more emptied by love on "Calm" than on this track. He raises some sparks here (not too many), but "emptiness"? I dunno. And "Joy"? Is it joyful? Sure. I make no claim to find Mr. Shorter's storm, calm, emptiness, or joy wanting. I only wonder if his titles do not impose on the listener and compel him to judge the music by its success or failure in raising the specified feelings. Of course, programmatic titles like this in jazz are older than "Struttin' with Some Barbecue" (now there would have been a great one to cover on this album), but still always risky.

This album, like Super Nova, now sounds more dated than much of Shorter's work with Art Blakey and Miles Davis, as well as his earlier Blue Notes. It may be historically important as a forerunner of Weather Report, or nostalgic for old jazz flower pushers. Shorter always plays well. But if you only have money for one Shorter album, Etc. is the one to find. ---Robert Spencer, allaboutjazz.com

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