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» Classical Reviews

Tabligh
Wadada Leo Smith

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Artist
Wadada Leo Smith

Album
Tabligh

Rating
★★★★☆

Release Date
May 13, 2008

Recording Date
2005

Label
Cuneiform

Type
Live

Genre Styles
Jazz Modern Free Avant-Garde Jazz

- Moods
- Uncompromising
 - Sprawling
 - Spiritual
 - Sparse
 - Searching
 - Restrained
 - Sophisticated
 - Poignant
 - Provocative
 - Refined/Mannered
 - Lively
 - Literate
 - Ethereal
 - Earthy
 - Enigmatic
 - Dreamy
 - Dramatic
 - Complex
 - Cerebral
 - Calm/Peaceful

Review

by Thom Jurek

Trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith remains as ambitious and creative as ever. Smith's *Golden Quartet* was formed -- and its membership has shifted -- to foster a particular kind of dynamic musical engagement. For this date, recorded at the RedCat (sic) in Los Angeles, Smith called upon the talents of pianist and keyboardist *Vijay Iyer*, bassist *John Lindberg*, and drummer *Shannon Jackson*. The set is comprised of four long pieces that run from eight-and-a-half minutes to over 24. "Rosa Parks," a 16-minute piece, opens the CD. It reflects the ongoing influence of *Miles Davis*' electric work on Smith. A lone trumpet is heard at the outset, sparse, single-note phrases played with great restraint, but muscularity too. *Iyer*'s Fender Rhodes enters very slowly and skeletally at first, coloring Smith's lines only slightly. His synth provides a "breathing" atmospheric sound under the Rhodes. *Jackson* enters with cymbals with *Lindberg* playing arco. The halting, evolving melody begins to change shape a few minutes in and the band comes together behind *Jackson*'s shimmering yet propulsive beat. They engage as an ensemble from the jump, wah-wah pedals on the bass, the more strident pronouncements of the Rhodes and the dancing trapkit create a palette for Smith to enter and play off of, winding them around him and his trademark phrasing playing through them. The piece ends in a complete different place than it began. "DeJohnette," named for the drummer (a founding member of this band) comes at improvisation from a different angle. *Iyer* is on grand piano, and of course *Jackson* laying down beats, breaks, and stuttering stops and angles for the band to play off of. He is a consummate rhythm master. The pianist and *Lindberg* engage freely in improvisation-building intensity before Smith enters at about the four-minute mark, blowing hard.

This is intense listening music: phrases fly simultaneously from one player to another, all picked up in tandem almost instinctively as they flow as a unit off the bandstand. By contrast, "Caravan of Winter" feels almost like a mirror image piece as it flows directly out of "DeJohnette," though the tempo is slower and the engagement a little more sparse. Its Spanish flamenco and Asian overtones are delightful even as the piece itself is moody and somewhat angular. Finally, the title track, which is defined as "the work done by Muslims to call others to Allah" -- and the longest cut here -- comes off more as a suite than a single tune. Like "Rosa Parks," it begins with glimmering, nocturnal sounds from *Iyer*'s various keyboards. Smith uses a mute for large swathes of this, and it seems he is offering a ballad, but that's deceptive. In fact, as his trumpet enters, it is almost like the sound of a Muzzein calling the faithful to prayer. *Iyer* switches to piano at about seven minutes, and the rest of the band enters in force. The work becomes a powerful improvisation with *Lindberg* and *Jackson* powering the band right out front, as Smith and *Iyer* color their rhythmic interaction. Dynamics shift and shape the sense of time and space with in the tune, and it finishes almost as a lullaby. Smith, in his 60s, is not only as inventive and adventurous as he was when he was a younger player, but his creativity and ability to direct a band into new territory is actually farther reaching than ever before. This is brilliant work.

Tracks

	Title	Composer	Time
1	Rosa Parks	Smith	16:14
2	DeJohnette	Smith	13:58
3	Caravan of Winter	Smith	8:41

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Poor 340 - 619

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Ambitious

4 Tabligh

Smith

24:34

AMG Album ID

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Corrections to this Entry?

indicates  Track Pick