

Moment's Notice

Reviews of Recent Recordings (continued)

Steve Colson

The Untarnished Dream

Silver Sphinx SS12403



By all rights, Adegoke Steve Colson's discography as a leader should be pages long. As it is, it contains only a scant five titles, beginning with the Unity Troupe recordings of 1978-80 issued as *Triumph!* (on Colson's Silver Sphinx imprint) and *No Reservation* (Black Saint). Those albums not only established Colson as a gifted pianist and composer, but a prescient leader whose synthesis of the populism and experimentalism of the AACM can be heard as a predicate for Nicole Mitchell and others. To a substantial degree, Colson achieved this through his writing for the voice of his wife, Iqua Colson, whose ability to swing is matched by the rarer skill of giving a human dimension to art song contours. This is confirmed on *The Untarnished Dream*, even though Iqua Colson sings on only four of Colson's nine tracks with Reggie Workman and Andrew Cyrille. The Colsons' reprise of "Triumph of the Outcasts, Coming" – the last piece on *Triumph!* -- is a fine example of both Colson's demanding vocal parts and Iqua Colson's projection of warmth and ease. Conversely, the title tune demonstrates Colson sure feel for a tune that turns a phrase every which way, and Iqua Colson's ability to give it an uncontrived glow. Colson's writing on the trio tracks is equally wide-ranging, spanning smart, swinging tunes like "Circumstantial" and elastically structured compositions like "Parallel Universe." Cyrille and Workman are the consummate rhythm tandem on the more concisely scripted tunes, supplying pungent fills and turning the heat up a notch at precisely the right moments. They are frequently brilliant in more freely improvised spaces. Colson is adept in each of the idioms included in the set; but more importantly, he maintains a continuity of voice in each. His playing is occasionally reminiscent of Andrew Hill's in the '70s for its use of abrupt silence, short churning phrases and large jabbing chords. He projects the same quiet sureness whether he is sprinting through an exacting set of changes or comping Iqua Colson; it's

the glue that holds all the facets together. Most importantly, *The Untarnished Dream* is a sorely needed reminder that the Colsons can rally folks, stoke their passions and their spirits.

–Bill Shoemaker

Dawn of Midi

First

Accretions 048



What's in a name? With Dawn of Midi, it's important to avoid any misconceptions by clarifying right off the bat that this is *not* a plugged-in retro-fusion band. ("Midi" may be a reference to the south of France, as the band apparently spends part of its time together in Paris – or maybe not.) Nor, for that matter, is it a World Music or "ethnic" jazz ensemble, despite the fact that its members – pianist Amino Belyamani, bassist Aakaash Israni, and percussionist Qasim Naqvi – are Moroccan, Indian, and Pakistani, respectively. Moreover, if you're hung up on categories and willing to accept the distinction, I'd say they're not a jazz band per se, but a devoutly acoustic improvisatory trio that draws upon occasional jazz, classical, *and* ethnic resources. And they do it well.

The group's identity is defined by its acoustic properties – tonal nuances that vary from piece to piece according to touch and timbre. All three alter their sound to affect dramatic contrasts. Israni, for example, will rattle his strings percussively, let ripe bass notes resonate in the air, or serve as a harmonic fulcrum for the shifting modalities of the piano and drums. Naqvi's patterns and accents – often faint echoes of wood, metal, or brush – are sparse, responsive, and unpredictable. Belyamani's piano ranges from chiming bell tones to muted pin-pricks and feathery caresses. From these sonorities they construct environments and a narrative of engagement, rather than "tunes" – melodies blossom from insinuated motifs, then just as quickly dissolve, unresolved. Instead of conforming to symmetrical phrases, they re-design the space around their abstracted shapes with polyrhythms (some possibly derived from ethnic musics) and supple interplay. Though the energy level is frequently subdued, an inevitable drama builds from the audible tension between intuitive commitment and organizational impulse, reflecting their individual experiences in more rigid compositional forms. Dawn of Midi are storytellers, though unconventional ones, creating their own plots out of wisps of smoke and the musical substance at hand,