

down beat

For Contemporary Musicians

RECORD REVIEWS

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Global Gallimaufry

The grandly amorphous World Music tag designates the work of forward-looking musicians who draw deeply from non-Western musical traditions without being consumed by folk impulses. Those surveyed below, akin in spirit to David Byrne, Don Cherry, Jon Hassell, Steve Tibbetts, and many others, use the cross-pollination of music in their pursuit of artistic beauty and rarefied ideals. Financial recompense and mainstream acceptance are of little concern. The Do'a World Music Ensemble, for example, fosters the hope their multi-culture tunefulness will somehow help towards "the unity of the human race." Record jacket annotator/critic Nat Hentoff points out that the Eternal Wind group tries to "resensitize us . . . to the cultures and deep identities of other peoples." These players may appear to be donning the guise of dreamy folkies or Happy Valley truthseekers, but when one hears the music it's possible to be drawn to the vision behind it.

Do'a World Music Ensemble co-leaders Randy Armstrong and Ken LaRoche, joined on *Companions Of The Crimson Coloured Ark* (Philo 9009) by three new members, proffer a sensible fusion of jazz and global ingredients. The album has the reverential feel of the pair's Bahai' faith, but quasi-secular group vivacity keeps religious approbation in check. The New Hampshire ensemble reaches lofty summits: the 14-minute title opus is a marvelous kaleidoscope of shifting melodies, rhythms, and instrumental colors. Aural ecstasy arrives when LaRoche's soprano saxophone soars over the percussion incendiary of Armstrong's balafon (West African gourd xylophone) and Marty Quinn's tabla/Western drum kit. Even when Do'a courts mannered prettiness, noticeably when jazz-minded saxophonist Charlie Jennison rests (most of the second side), the music has an improvisational/compositional mood of life-affirming spiritedness.