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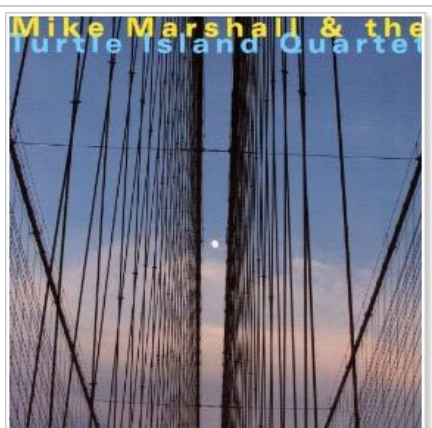
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MUSIC REVIEW: 'MIKE MARSHALL & THE TURTLE ISLAND QUARTET' SELF-TITLED CD

Posted by: Jon Sobel March 27, 2014
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Ears attuned to any number of musical tastes will find Mike Marshall and the Turtle Island Quartet's self-titled CD an aural feast. Whether it's the sound of the classical string quartet, the inventive directions of "nu-grass," or Yo-Yo Ma and Chris Thile's *The Goat Rodeo Sessions*, for lovers of music that's both serious and fun this recording will ring evocative bells and captivate the attention.

The disc opens with a four-movement suite for mandolin and string quartet by Turtle Island founder David Balakrishnan. Woven with richly imagined textures and a mix of traditional and unexpected rhythms, the music fuses Indian classical music with folk/Americana. The first movement has a questioning flavor, even in its fast section. Marshall's delicate touch on the mandolin, facility with rhythm and with chordal magic, and admirable lyrical sensitivity drive the second. In the third, we witness violinist/composer Balakrishnan's knack for cross-stylings as he shifts from the dissonance of the slow introduction to the syncopated 4/4 of the main part of the movement with its unison string melodies, coruscating harmonies, and mandolin filigrees.



The suite closes with the seething funk of "Thyaga," Sanskrit for "non-attachment to the fruits of one's actions" (make up your own relevance). The piece builds to a frenzy before resolving into a cloud of uncertainty.

The rest of the disc presents several Brazilian-flavored pieces by different composers along with four of Marshall's compositions, all in their own ways worthwhile and frequently inspiring.

The combination of bowed and plucked strings makes an ensemble like this into something of a mini-orchestra. Listening to this music puts me in mind of eating a gourmet dish in which not only flavors but textures are artfully combined. Marshall's "Egypt" reminds me melodically of one of the pieces from *The Goat Rodeo Sessions*, in fact. A pizzicato cello solo jumps out as in a jazz improv, then gives way to a swishing violin segment that dissolves into a restatement of the

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reflective intro.

Marshall's "House Camp" shows the mandolinist's energetic compositional creativity with a mostly straight-ahead rhythm and distinct "solo" sections, while "Gator Strut" is just what its title suggests, a dark, meaty morsel of funky-up dirty jazz. His melodic "Sweets Mill" with its harmonic swells and gentle waltz section surprisingly brings to mind a sophisticated golden-age Broadway musical.

As a coda or encore, Darol Anger's arrangement of "Crossroads" is fun, though it reminds me of the recent controversy when the TV show *Glee* presented Jonathan Coulton's melodic arrangement of Sir Mixalot's "Baby Got Back" as its own. To a significant degree this is really Anger's arrangement of *Cream's* arrangement of Robert Johnson's blues classic.

But let that pass. Stellar musicianship is the byword throughout this disc, the first collaboration by these long-established artists. Pleasurable and thought-provoking from start to finish, it has earned a permanent place on my digital shelf with the best eclectic, original, yet thoroughly enjoyable and accessible instrumental projects of modern times.

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ABOUT JON SOBEL



Jon Sobel is an Executive Editor of Blogcritics as well as lead editor of the Culture section. As a writer he contributes most often to Culture, where he reviews NYC theater; he also covers interesting music releases and writes a semi-regular round-up of reviews of independent albums. He writes the blog Park Odyssey, for which he is visiting and blogging every park in New York City—over a thousand of them. Through Oren Hope Marketing and Copywriting you can hire him to write or edit whatever marketing or journalistic materials your heart desires. By night he's a working musician: lead singer, songwriter, and bass player for Whisperado, a member of other bands as well, and a sideman.



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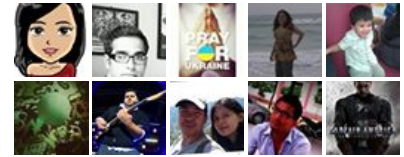
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