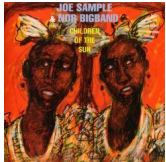


Joe Sample & NDR Big Band - Children Of The Sun (2012)

Written by bluesever

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01. *I Wanna Go Home* [06:41] 02. *Buttermilk Sky* [05:22] 03. *Islands Of The Mind* [06:14] 04. *Rumfire* [05:51] 05. *Gold In The Cane (Intro)* [01:17] 06. *Gold In The Cane* [04:29] 07. *I Believe In* [05:53] 08. *Children Of The Sun* [04:52] 09. *Blue Abyss* [08:14] 10. *Creole Eyes* [05:50] 11. *Albatross Day* [07:39] Joe Sample: composer, piano, Fender Rhodes; Jorg Achim Keller: conductor, arranger; Nils Landgren: solo trombone; Thorsten Berkenstein: trumpet, flugelhorn; Ingolf Burkhardt: trumpet, flugelhorn; Claus Stotter: trumpet, flugelhorn; Reiner Winterschladen: trumpet, flugelhorn (1, 3-6, 9, 10); Dirk Lentschat: trumpet, flugelhorn (2, 7, 8, 11); Fiete Felsch: alto, soprano sax, flute, piccolo flute, clarinet; Peter Bolte: alto sax, flute, clarinet; Sebastian Gille: tenor sax, clarinet; Frank Delle: tenor sax, flute, clarinet (1, 4-6, 9, 10), baritone sax, bass clarinet, soprano sax (2, 3, 7, 8, 11); Bjorn Berger: baritone sax, bass clarinet, soprano sax (1, 4-6, 9, 10); Lutz Buchner: clarinet, bass clarinet (7); Gabriel Coburger: tenor sax, flute, clarinet (2, 3, 7, 8, 11); Dan Gottshall: trombone; Klaus Heidenreich: trombone; Stefan Lotterman: trombone; Ingo Lahme: bass trombone; Stephan Dietz: guitar (1, 2, 4-6, 10, 11); Ingmar Heller: bass; Steve Gadd: drums; Marcio Doctor: percussion (1-8, 11).

Even longtime fans of Joe Sample don't normally associate the music he wrote and played with Caribbean and Latin rhythms. That said, *Children of the Sun*, commissioned by and recorded with the NDR Bigband, is drenched in them. The album's inspiration dates back to 1995 when Sample played a date at the St. Croix Jazz Festival. He spent some time on the island afterward and did some hiking. He was struck by the contrast between its gorgeous scenery and its notorious history as part of the "Middle Passage" in the slave trade triangle between Africa and the New World: "This seemingly idyllic place had been an island of suffering and torment, floating in a blue abyss...." Shortly after leaving St. Croix, ideas for melodies and themes began to come to him. Sample wrote them down and let them gestate until he received an invitation from trombonist Nils Landgren to write for the NDRB. Landgren is featured as a soloist, and the mighty Steve Gadd was enlisted to play drums on the date. Sample's grooving' Trinidadian folk melody creates the set's theme on opener "I Wanna Go Home," but Afro-Cuban montunos grace his playing on "Buttermilk Sky" (not the Hoagy Carmichael nugget), which contrasts with the trombonist's low-end soloing. While "Islands of the Mind" commences as a nearly cinematic

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theme with lush brass and wind harmonics, it gives way to an intimate, soulful, bluesy fingerpopper with Sample's piano at the forefront. "Gold in the Cane," despite its brooding solo piano intro, is a breezy merengue with gorgeous interplay written into the horn and wind charts. There is a simmering samba tinge in "I Believe In," with a lovely clarinet solo by Gabriel Coburger. The title track weaves soul-gospel and blues with Caribbean motifs, while "Blue Skies" is a remarkable midtempo showcase for both Sample and Gadd; they lock on and swing mightily. Closer "Albatross Day" is a highlight that offers a striking portrait of why the NDR Bigband is one of the brightest units on the scene, with their gorgeous tones, unshakeable time, and enough languid elasticity to offer pianist, trombonist, and Coburger's tenor a setting for their lithe grooves. True to its inspiration, the striking contrast between beauty and pain is captured perfectly on Children of the Sun; it is easily the most ambitious recording in Sample's vast catalog, which is no mean feat. The bittersweet coda here is that he passed away months before it was finally picked up for North American distribution. This is a testament to his legacy as one of mainstream jazz's finest composers during the last half-century, and to his prodigious gifts as pianist and arranger. ---Thom Jurek, allmusic.com

Toward the end of his remarkable career, the late pianist Joe Sample (he died on September 12, 2014) traveled to Hamburg, Germany, to record Children of the Sun, a suite of his own music, with the splendid NDR Big Band. The eleven compositions were inspired by Sample's appearance at the 1995 St. Croix Jazz Festival, where he weighed the beauty of that island paradise against the brutality of slavery (17th Century St. Croix was a crucial part of what is referred to as slavery's "middle passage") and the helplessness and hopelessness the captives must have felt. Sample thought something should be written to exemplify and underscore those extremes.

Seductive rhythms of the Caribbean predominate (especially early on) and are superbly managed by drummer par excellence Steve Gadd and the ensemble. This represents a slight departure for Sample, who wasn't widely known as a composer of Latin themes, but the genre suits him well. The NDR Big Band, for its part, proves again that music is a universal language, warmly embracing Sample's free-flowing West Indian-cum-jazz essays and bringing them emphatically to life. The enterprise is saliently enriched by Sample's lithe and swinging piano (he solos perceptively on five numbers) and the clear-eyed trombone of a second guest artist, Nils Landgren, who brightens the invigorating opener, "I Wanna Go Home," reappears midway through the album, on "Gold in the Cane," and solos on every number thereafter save one, "Creole Eyes." He is especially engaging on the slower-paced "Children of the Sun" and "Blue Abyss."

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Trombonists Dan Gottshall, Klaus Heidenreich and Stefan Lotterman add brief solos on "Blue Abyss," as do bass trombonist Ingo Lahme and tenor saxophonist Sebastian Gille. Heidenreich is out front again, this time with tenor Frank Delle and trumpeter Ingolf Burkhardt, on the undulating "Creole Eyes." Alto Peter Bolte shares blowing space with Sample on "Buttermilk Sky" (not to be confused with the Hoagy Carmichael standard of that name), while flugel Claus Stotter does the same on "Islands of the Mind" and "Rumfire" (on which tenor Gille also solos). "I Believe In" is an even-tempered samba with self-assured solos by Landgren, Delle (soprano), Burkhardt, flugel Fiete Felsch and clarinetist Lutz Buchner.

Whether Sample reached his goal is beside the point (thematic music is invariably subjective). What matters most is that he has produced a commendable album of Caribbean-style jazz, proficiently performed by the NDR Big Band Orchestra, thus further amplifying Sample's already impressive legacy. ---Jack Bowers, allaboutjazz.com

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