

## The Mahavishnu Orchestra - Apocalypse (1974)

Written by bluesever  
Monday, 22 July 2019 15:43 -

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1 *Power Of Love* 4:13 2 *Vision Is A Naked Sword* 14:18 3 *Smile Of The Beyond* 8:00 4  
*Wings Of Karma* 6:06 5 *Hymn To Him* 19:19 Bass, Bass Guitar, Vocals – Ralphe  
Armstrong Cello, Vocals – Philip Hirschi Conductor – Michael Tilson Thomas Drums,  
Percussion, Vocals – Michael Walden Guitar [Guitars], Electronics [Vocal Composer] –  
Mahavishnu Keyboards, Vocals – Gayle Moran Leader [The London Symphony Orchestra] –  
Hugh Beau Orchestra – The London Symphony Orchestra Piano – Michael Tilson Thomas  
Viola – Marsha Westbrook Violin [Electric, Electric Baritone] – Jean-Luc Ponty Violin, Vocals –  
Carol Shive

Wow! This 1974 recording had a great pedigree. First, you had Beatles producer George Martin. Then Michael Tilson Thomas, the young and gifted classical conductor, waving his magic wand in front of the London Symphony Orchestra. Jazz violin superstar Jean Luc Ponty stepped up as part of a newly expanded Mahavishnu Orchestra, and the teenage bass phenom Ralphe Armstrong more than capably held down the bottom end. Gayle Moran, Chick Corea's girlfriend, handled the keyboards and vocals, and Narada Michael Walden played drums. Last, of course, the guitar master Mahavishnu John McLaughlin, leading an Orchestra that was augmented by an impressive string section of its own. Producer Martin has stated in interviews that he considers this album to be one of the greatest he's ever produced. And that's saying a lot considering the landmark albums he produced for the Fab Four.

McLaughlin's compositional skills stand out on *Apocalypse*. Jean Luc Ponty made his debut with the Mahavishnu Orchestra on this album, and added energy to McLaughlin's inspired tunes. In a precious moment on "Hymn to Him," McLaughlin and Ponty achieve hyper stellar overdrive.

The true sleeper on this album is the opening "Power of Love." McLaughlin wields his acoustic

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guitar to front the LSO on this piece, a deliberate and uplifting tune. The remainder of the album features a highly charged McLaughlin. His electric playing is reminiscent of a finely tuned car engine: it purrs as smooth as a kitten, but can accelerate or stop abruptly when necessary. Ponty, McLaughlin's original choice for the first Mahavishnu Orchestra, really excels on Apocalypse. Years later he would say he probably left this band too soon. One only has to hear his musical interaction with McLaughlin to quickly agree.

The album does have one low moment, the misinformed "Smile of the Beyond". Despite some great playing on this tune, you have to suffer through a lengthy build-up which includes a vocal section. Moran's vocals are very nice, but because they are part of an overlong introduction, they are lost a bit. If McLaughlin had shortened the tune by three minutes, it would be a classic!

The London Symphony Orchestra deserves recognition as well. Yes, I know these guys would play just about anything for a paycheck. There was even some complaining about a few arrogant string players. But they did take advantage of these compositions and the orchestral arrangements, in which McLaughlin was greatly aided by Michael Gibbs. Many times on recordings like this—by Emerson, Lake and Palmer for example—the orchestra seems to be there for the effect only. In this case, the LSO had some really interesting things to say.

To perform this music live with a symphony orchestra was a nightmare. McLaughlin occasionally speaks upon the impossible technical requirements of the day, and in particular an unpleasant but eventually rewarding last minute experience with America's Buffalo Symphony Orchestra. ---Walter Kolosky, [allaboutjazz.com](http://allaboutjazz.com)

The first recording of the second Mahavishnu Orchestra was a real stretch for John McLaughlin, an encounter with Michael Tilson Thomas and the London Symphony Orchestra. The union wasn't taken seriously at the time, and it ended up harming the reputation of Thomas -- a remarkably adventurous young conductor who defied the stuffy classical powers-that-be and thus probably delayed his eventual rise to the top -- more than McLaughlin. But those with ears, then and now, beheld a remarkable series of pieces that neatly juxtapose and occasionally

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combine the combustion of McLaughlin's group with rich, tasteful symphonic statements orchestrated for McLaughlin by Michael Gibbs. The new Mahavishnu-ites, electric violinist Jean-Luc Ponty and keyboardist/vocalist Gayle Moran, have their moments, but the real focus of this disc is the quality of the symphonic conceptions and how well McLaughlin blends his lyrical and fiery guitar into the mixture. The best stretch is the breathtakingly ethereal opening of "Hymn to Him"; the promise of fusing rock, jazz, and classical elements had never been executed so alluringly before -- and wouldn't you know, an old experienced hand at introducing classical textures into rock, the Beatles' George Martin, is the producer. Don't let old, outworn preconceptions on either side of the fence prevent you from checking out this beautiful record. ---Richard S. Ginell, AllMusic Review

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