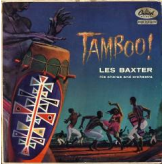


Les Baxter - Tamboo! (1955)

Written by bluesever

Wednesday, 27 February 2019 14:26 -

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*A1 Simba A2 Oasis Of Dakhla A3 Maracaibo A4 Tehran A5 Pantan A6 Havana
B1 Mozambique B2 Wotuka B3 Cuchibamba B4 Batumba B5 Rio B6 Zambezi*
Les Baxter - Composer, Piano, Primary Artist

Those who think exotica records are just tiki silliness and kitsch should definitely give Les Baxter's *Tamboo* a serious listen. Despite the cheezy and ignorantly semi-racist cover art work, there is some serious music going on here. Baxter was an extremely prolific composer and record producer who worked in the fields of easy listening and soundtracks, as well as different varieties of what has come to be called 'exotica'. Over the years, as the exotica style became a gimmick, Les let his artistry slip, but this is one of Baxter's early exotica attempts and on this one he is earnest and sincere about mixing different musical genres into a fascinating new style of his own.

The whole idea of melding musical styles to create a sort of fantasy world of sound begins with Les Baxter. Before there was Sun Ra, King Crimson, Herbie's Sextet, Brian Eno or Bill Laswell there was Les Baxter mixing Afro-Cuban rhythms, Debussy's orchestrations and modern studio trickery to create musical lands that didn't really exist. Sun Ra himself stated his admiration for Baxter, an admiration I had always assumed after hearing Sun Ra's very exotica flavored 'Angels and Demons at Play' LP.

Saying that there is something other-worldly or futuristic about this music may seem cliché since it is obvious that is what Baxter is going for, but when those wordless vocals quietly cascade over a syncopated Afro-Latin groove accompanied by first dew in the morning twinkly Debussy type orchestrations, you know you have arrived somewhere very different then the places you have known before, a place that is very moving and beautiful too. ---jazzmusicarchives.com

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Long before the term "world music" leaped into the lexicon, pianist, composer, and arranger Les Baxter was plundering the globe in search of new sounds with which to entice listeners. Having already single-handedly invented space pop, with his pioneering use of the theremin in the early '50s, Baxter turned from Music Out of the Moon back to this planet, with a stream of albums that captured Earth's more exotic styles. Tamboo! was his epiphany, a set that circled the globe, but was presented in a wildly accessible style that even your gran would love. In many ways the music is reminiscent of the Technicolor Hollywood visions of foreign climes, à la South Pacific and other such films. But that's not surprising, considering the amount of music Baxter composed for Tinsel Town, and it certainly helped make this album so appealing. The bright and bustling "Havana" beautifully captures the excitement and allure of the pre-revolutionary capital, while "Tehran" wafts of exotic mystery, dancing girls, and whirling dervishes. In contrast, the effervescent "Cuchibamba" hints at Latin America's indigenous roots, and "Rio" at its sophistication and glamour. But it's the many African-inspired numbers that are the most intriguing -- the desert wind which seems to haunt the "Oasis of Dakhla," the tribal drumming which invades "Mozambique" and sweeps across the "Zambezi." Even at his most exotic, however, Baxter encapsulates all these elements in a Western context, his lavish orchestral arrangements and rich melodies taking the strangeness out of even the most alien foreign styles. It's brilliantly done, and helped to broaden American minds and widen musical views. ---Jo-Ann Greene, AllMusic Review

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