

Jeremy Steig - Temple of Birth (1975)

Written by bluesever

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A1 King Tut Strut 8:38 A2 Gale 2:35 A3 Ouanga 7:58 A4 Mountain Dew Dues 3:53 B1 Goose Bumps 3:56 B2 Belly Up 3:16 B3 Temple Of Birth 2:14 B4 Shifte-Telle Mama 9:39 B5 Rupunzel 2:51 Jeremy Steig - flute, flute [Bass] Johnny Winter (A1, A3, A4) - guitar acoustic, guitar electric Anthony Jackson (A1 - A4, B1, B2, B4) - bass Alphonse Mouzon (A1 - A4, B1, B2, B4) - drums Ray Mantilla (A1 - A4, B2, B4) - percussion, congas Richie Beirach - piano, piano electric

I assumed going into this that it was fairly nondescript jazz fusion and/or lame jazz funk, which ended up being the case, but the personnel list intrigued the hell out of me. The guy behind the drumkit for the album is none other than Alphonse Mouzon of Weather Report. The Fender Rhodes (and the piano on B5) is being played by Richie Beirach. The bass player is Anthony Jackson, and he's scary good on a few of these. But the big shocker is that the guy playing lead guitar on A1 and A3 (and the acoustic slide on A4) is Johnny Winter.

Yes, that Johnny Winter.

I started up A1, which is a laughably slick eight and a half minute jazz-funk track that sounds vaguely like an unreleased jam from Aja, albeit with, y'know, assloads of jazz flute. Steig, as per usual, takes what seems like a fourteen minute long solo. Then Johnny starts playing, and he sounds just as clinical as the rest of the band. Y'know Walter Becker's tone on the guitar solo to Josie? That's the tone Johnny Winter's gone with. It doesn't feel right. Then Richie does a Rhodes solo... and he's decided it'd be cool to run the thing through a Mu-Tron. For people who aren't gear freaks, that's an envelope filter pedal, also known as an auto-wah... and I've done nothing to clarify things, have I? Hold on...

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...Zappa's solo on Inca Roads. Or if you prefer, Pete Townshend's solo on Going Mobile. That's an envelope filter. Stevie Wonder threw one at a clavinet to get the tone for the intro of Higher Ground, but the reason that worked is because the clavinet's already a quacky sounding instrument anyway. You put a Rhodes through an envelope filter and it stops sounding like a Rhodes and starts sounding like a goofy, shitty synthesizer.

A2 sounds like one of those shorter spiritual-but-oddly-polite tracks off Birds of Fire. A3's probably the only track here worth a damn, with an astonishing bassline and a decent jam going. But it takes a silly detour out of the groove and into straight jazz drumming for Richie's solo and the whole damn song stops working. Johnny's solo, again, doesn't gel with the rest of the track. A4 is just Jeremy and Johnny Winter, and is an acoustic blues guitar/flute duet. It's about as awkward as it sounds.

B1 is what I imagine Dixie Dregs sound like: riff based, not-as-funky-as-it's-trying-to-be fusion. Starts with a decent break, but that's about it. B2 reminds me a bit of a Mahavishnu track or a Return to Forever track in that they seem to be playing absurdly fast for the sake of playing absurdly fast. B3's a short duet between Jeremy and Richie. B4's a godawful nearly ten minute long doozy with an incredibly dull first four minutes, at which point it shifts into B2's territory of amphetamine drumming and wanky soloing for the remaining five minutes.

And B5's... another Jeremy/Richie duet, this time with the latter on piano instead of Rhodes, and it might be the worst track on the album.

This thing's only 41 minutes long, but it's tedious and stilted enough to feel like an hour.
---thrasher2809, rateyourmusic.com

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