

textura



Hevreh Ensemble: *A Path of Light* Ansonica Records

The name Hevreh Ensemble chose for itself couldn't have been better, given that the translation for the Hebrew word Hevreh is 'Circle of Friends.' Not only have the four members forged deep connections, musical and otherwise, since the group's 2004 inception, the quartet's joined on its third album *A Path of Light* by more friends, namely the string quartet ETHEL (violinists Kip Jones and Corin Lee, cellist Dorothy Lawson, and violist Ralph Farris, also credited with vocals and minimoog on the recording), Silkroad percussionist Shane Shanahan, double bassist George Rush, and tablaist Naren Budhkar.

Hevreh members Jeff Adler (bass clarinet, Native American flutes), Judith Dansker (oboe, Native American flute), Laurie Friedman (clarinet, Native American flute), and Adam Morrison (piano, keyboards) bring to their collective endeavour training from the Juilliard and Manhattan Schools of Music, SUNY Stonybrook, Brooklyn College, and the Jerusalem Conservatory in Israel, the institutions alone reflecting the diversity of the ethno-classical music the outfit creates. Though all the compositions on the release were written by Adler, Hevreh Ensemble is very much a group of equals, each member integral to its harmonious sound and the seeming ease with which the music's oft-intricate charts are executed. Soloing is generally downplayed for tight ensemble playing where the players follow Adler's notated material with precision, yet the performances never feel overly studious.

With a faint wisp of Jethro Tull's "Living in the Past" emanating from the bass line, Rush propels "Sima de los Huesos" (Cave of Bones) into being, followed seconds later by the seductive Pied Piper combination of Native American flute, hand drums, and other woodwinds. The ensemble conjures a joyous sound in this

swoon-inducing opener, the musicians deftly shifting from one episode to the next at high speed and the breezy ride over in slightly less than four minutes. Inspired by a book written by Israel mystic Izthak Berry, "A Path of Light" shows how comfortably the group blends elements associated with different cultures. The meditative intro first merges gamelan-styled percussion with tabla, after which a high-energy, rather klezmer-influenced episode follows, all such moves reflecting the group's openness to a plethora of musical languages. (Interestingly, the track's Mr. Hyde-like counterpart, "Speed of Dark," reprises melodic material from "A Path of Light" but casts it in shadow and occasional moments of dissonance.)

Dansker's oboe carves a lyrical path through "A Thousand Questions," though the multiple layers of woodwinds and percussion accompanying her are as critical to the resultant effect. Even more arresting is "Amor Caritas" (Love and Charity), where her sinuous lead instantly catches the ear and doesn't let go, Morrison not far behind in the captivating department. "Hawk Sighting," a tribute to Adler's late friend Hawk Little John, a Cherokee flute maker and mystic, adds a quasi-jazz vibe to the recording in undergirding its woodwinds front-line with electric piano and an earthy swing rhythm. In similar manner, the even harder-swinging "Sweetgrass, Cedar and Sage" makes room for a mid-song foray into piano-driven stride. A hint of Reich-styled minimalism, on the other hand, is audible in the intricate piano-and-woodwinds patterning of "Hacked." If "Epilogue" brings this largely sunny album to a surprisingly sepulchral close, it's because it's designed to convey the consequences of choosing the path proposed in "Speed of Dark."

The ease with which the four seamlessly combine different elements in their performances is but one of the many things recommending the outfit. Adler's melodies sing on this recording, the group's follow-up to 2012's *Between Worlds*, and the music is consistently infectious. *A Path of Light* exemplifies small-group playing at its finest, with the four members, even if augmented by guests, presenting an uplifting 'World Music' capable of global appeal. The album might have been recorded at a studio in Brooklyn, but its contents and message transcend borders.

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