

Pharoah Sanders - Thembi (1966)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Astral Travelling* (5:48) 2. *Red, Black & Green* (8:56) 3. *Thembi* (7:02) 4. *Love* (5:12) 5. *Morning Prayer* (9:11) 6. *Bailophone Dance* (5:43) Musicians: Pharoah Sanders (tenor & soprano saxophones, alto flute, fife, bailophone, brass bell, bells, maracas, cow horn, percussion); Michael White (violin, percussion); Lonnie Liston Smith (bailophone, piano, electric piano, claves, ring cymbals, percussion, background vocals); Cecil McBee (bass, finger cymbals, percussion, sound effects); Clifford Jarvis (drums, maracas, bells, percussion); Roy Haynes (drums); Chief Bey, Majid Shabazz, Anthony Wiles, Nat Bettis (percussion); James Jordon (ring cymbals).

Recorded with two different ensembles, *Thembi* was a departure from the slowly developing, side-long, mantra-like grooves Pharoah Sanders had been pursuing for most of his solo career. It's musically all over the map but, even if it lacks the same consistency of mood as many of Sanders' previous albums, it does offer an intriguingly wide range of relatively concise ideas, making it something of an anomaly in Sanders' prime period. Over the six selections, Sanders romps through a tremendous variety of instruments, including tenor, soprano, alto flute, fifes, the African bailophone, assorted small percussion, and even a cow horn. Perhaps because he's preoccupied elsewhere, there's relatively little of his trademark tenor screaming, limited mostly to the thunderous cacophony of "Red, Black & Green" and portions of "Morning Prayer." The compositions, too, try all sorts of different things. Keyboardist/pianist Lonnie Liston Smith's "Astral Traveling" is a shimmering, pastoral piece centered around his electric piano textures; "Love" is an intense, five-minute bass solo by Cecil McBee; and "Morning Prayer" and "Bailophone Dance" (which are segued together) add an expanded percussion section devoted exclusively to African instruments. If there's a unifying factor, it's the classic title track, which combines the softer lyricism of Sanders' soprano and Michael White's violin with the polyrhythmic grooves of the most Africanized material (not to mention a catchy bass riff). Some fans may gripe that *Thembi* isn't conceptually unified or intense enough, but it's rare to have this many different sides of Sanders coexisting in one place, and that's what makes the album such an interesting listen. --- Steve Huey, Rovi

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