

Wendell Harrison - Organic Dream (1981)

Written by bluesever

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1 Ginseng Love 4:06 2 Winter 6:39 3 Love Juice 4:46 4 Peace Of Mind 7:18 5 The Wok 6:43 6 A Green Meadow 5:55 Dennis Boles - Moog Synthesizer Miche Braden - Vocals, Vocals (Background) Kenny Demery - Guitar Andrew Gibson - Drums, Fender Rhodes, Percussion, Vocals (Background) Wendell Harrison - Clarinet, Flute, Moog Synthesizer, Percussion, Sax (Tenor), Vocals (Background) Wendell Lucas - Bass Kathy Simmons - Vocals Joe Tandy - Drums Pamela Wise - Fender Rhodes, Percussion, Piano, Vocals (Background)

Organic Dream was originally issued in 1981; the second Wendell Harrison album from his WenHa label. The set was released in a limited run, primarily as a vehicle for Harrison to document his tunes for publishing purposes, and to act as a calling card for booking agents. On this Luv N' Haight replica reissue, he confesses in the liner notes that his early records for WenHa were more like demos than carefully planned-out recordings, because he had a small budget and no distribution outlet. It sounds exactly like one; but that's not a criticism. "Ginseng Love" must be among the only post-disco-era R&B tunes to feature a clarinet and flute (both played by Harrison) in the front line. The Moog strings by Dennis Boles weight it down, however. Faring far better is "Winter," which harkens back to Harrison's years in the Tribe collective. His clarinet, bells, organic percussion, and Pam Wise's acoustic piano offer a shimmering, quiet meditation on the season. Harrison's playing is warm, original, and spiritual. "Love Juice" is exactly what it sounds like, a funky disco jam with an amped-up bassline by Wendell Lucas, and Harrison's wailing tenor over the riff, with vocals repeating "love that juice," repeatedly. It would have made a great 12". "Peace of Mind" commences as a spiritual soul ballad sung by Miche Braden before transforming itself into a smooth funk jam with excellent guitar work by Kenny Demery. "The Wok" is nearly inexplicable; it's an attempt at smooth, spacey, nocturnal funk and notable for its considerable experimentation. Harrison's clarinet floats above the meaty bassline, analog synths, electric guitars, and drums. It's a high point. Closer "A Green Meadow," with its more nuanced synth strings, icy Rhodes, amped-up bassline, and Harrison's tenor is an excellent illustration of Detroit smooth jazz. Organic Dream is imperfect in sound, production, and conception. That said, it's an interesting historical portrait of Detroit's Do-It-Yourself aesthetic during a particularly undocumented (though fertile) era

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(Griot Galaxy, on the avant end of the jazz spectrum, were also on the scene recording during this period). Moreover, it provides compelling, even prophetic evidence that Harrison was trying to weave together a host of different musics that were only woven seamlessly together, first with the real advent of sampling, and then in the sounds of club jazz and neo-soul. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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