

Etienne Charles - Creole Soul (2013)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Creole (Intro)* 0:19 2 *Creole* 6:26 3 *The Folks* 5:21 4 *You Don't Love Me* 6:03 5 *Roots* 6:33 6 *Memories* 6:06 7 *Green Chimneys* 5:46 8 *Turn Your Lights Down Low* 4:54 9 *Midnight* 6:53 10 *Close Your Eyes* 4:51 11 *Doin' The Thing* 3:40 Alto Saxophone – Brian Hogans Bass – Ben Williams (5) Drums – Obed Calvaire Guitar – Alex Wintz (tracks: 2,5,6) Percussion, Vocals – D'Achee (tracks: 2,3,5,7,11), Daniel Sadownick (tracks: 5) Piano, Electric Piano – Kris Bowers Tenor Saxophone – Jacques Schwarz-Bart Trumpet, Flugelhorn, Percussion, Producer – Etienne Charles Vocals – Erol Josué (tracks: 1,2)

On 2011's *Kaiso*, trumpeter and bandleader Etienne Charles examined calypso, his native Trinidad's most famous cultural export, through the lens of 21st century post-bop. The end result expanded the reach of both musics without watering down either. On *Creole Soul*, Charles and his group use modern creative jazz to engage 20th century Caribbean folk and pop traditions throughout the Caribbean, from Trinidad to Jamaica, from Haiti to Martinique, in originals and covers. Charles' band includes tenor saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart, alto saxophonist Brian Hogans, pianist Kris Bowers (who also plays Rhodes), bassist Ben Williams, and drummer Obed Calvaire, with guests including guitarist Alex Wintz, percussionist/vocalists Daniel Sadownick and D'Achee, and voodoo priest Erol Josué, who offers a chanted benediction to kick things off. Electric guitar, piano, and Calvaire's fiery backbeat offer a kongo groove from northern Haiti on the title cut. It opens to include the front-line horns, which add blues, driving post-bop, and progressive and lyric jazz to the head in a labyrinthine ride that concludes in something approaching song. "The Folks" commences as a breezy ballad complete with compelling rhythmic invention from Williams and Calvaire and includes excellent solos from Schwarz-Bart and Charles. The covers are of special interest. While the choice of Bob Marley's "Turn Your Lights Down Low" may seem obvious, its shimmering arrangement brings out the meld of American soul, reggae, calypso, and ranging melodic improvisation. Hogans' alto and Charles' trumpet play opposite sides of Marley's singing voice, offering a bridge between not only styles but harmonic investigation. The reading of Bo Diddley's "You Don't Love Me" is inspired by the rocksteady hit from vocalist Dawn Penn from the mid-'60s. Charles extrapolates that melody to explore funky hard bop with polyrhythms and breaks. Thelonious Monk's "Green Chimneys" is arranged to embellish the calypso root in its melody.

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The nuances of harmonic invention here are drawn into a wonderful contrast with double-timed hand percussion and skittering cymbal work, with the trumpet and saxes covering the subtle key and lyric shifts. On "Midnight," Haitian masearon dance groove meets calypso rhythms and jazz syncopation, delivered with an warm yet knotty head by the horns, whose players all deliver compelling solos. Set closer "Doin' the Thing" is a riotous rent party tune where calypso and Louis Jordan-esque jumping swing carry it out. While Charles mined this vein on his first three recordings, he's never reached as far as on Creole Soul. Here sophistication and execution deliver the breadth--and depth--of his ambitious vision in full. ---Thom Jurek, AllMusic Review

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