

Ambrose Akinmusire – The Imagined Savior Is Far Easier To Paint (2014)

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01. Marie Christie 03:17 02. As We Fight (Willie Penrose) 06:25 03. Our Basement (Ed) 06:28 04. Vartha 07:48 05. Memo (G. Learson) 05:53 06. The Beauty Of Dissolving Portraits 04:14 07. Asiam (Joan) 06:03 08. Bubbles (John William Sublett) 03:55 09. Ceaseless Inexhaustible Child (Cyntoia Brown) 06:12 10. Rollcall For Those Absent 03:39 11. J.E. Nilmah (Ecclesiastes 6:10) 05:13 12. Inflatedbyspinning 03:03 13. Richard (Conduit) 16:28
Ambrose Akinmusire – Trumpet, Percussion Charles Altura - Guitar Theo Bleckmann - Effects, Vocals Justin Brown - Drums Kallie Ciechomski - Viola Cold Specks - Vocals Sam Harris - Mellotron, Piano Maria Im - Violin Maria Jeffers - Cello Elena Pinderhughes - Flute Harish Raghavan - Bass Brooke Quiggins Saulnier - Violin Walter Smith - Sax (Tenor) Becca Stevens - Vocals

After the stunning modern jazz trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire delivered on the acclaimed *When the Heart Emerges Glistening* in 2011, he plays it anything but safe on *The Imagined Savior Is Far Easier to Paint*. With his working quintet -- tenor saxophonist Walter Smith, drummer Justin Brown, bassist Harish Raghavan, and pianist Sam Harris -- he expands the frame to include guitarist Charles Altura in a sextet or alternating with Smith. In addition, vocalists Becca Stevens, Cold Specks, and Theo Bleckman (all of whom contribute lyrics) appear, as do the Osso String Quartet and flutist Elena Penderhughes. Akinmusire self-produced this set and showcases a diverse range of carefully scripted, genre-blurring compositions -- modern classical, vanguard pop, spoken word -- in addition to jazz. Opener "Marie Christie" is a piano and trumpet duet where Akinmusire evokes a moody lyric before engaging in a flurry of improvisation. "As We Fight (Willie Penrose)" unfolds gradually. Altura, Smith, and Akinmusire unwind the labyrinthine lyric before a martial snare and undulating bassline quicken the pace as keys and dynamics shift before a series of brief solos. "Vartha" is the most joyous tune here. Initiated by Altura's minor-key minimalist pulse and Raghavan's fluid bassline, it evolves along a linear chromatic line with pianistic embellishments and Akinmusire playing in an uncharacteristic warm, fat tone. "Our Basement (Ed)," written by Stevens, places her in the context of the string quartet's pulsing rhythm and more expressionistic suggestions by the trumpeter, Harris, and Brown. Her provocative phrasing eerily slips between the cracks of arty pop, early Americana, classical music, and vanguard jazz. "The Beauty of Dissolving

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Portraits" features the trumpeter soloing lyrically with a flute amid a nearly static drone by bass and string quartet. "Asiam (Joan)," inspired by Joni Mitchell, features Bleckman's gorgeous singing appended by his overdubbed trademark vocal effects and harmonies, as he weaves them inside an emotive harmonic frame by the quintet. "Bubbles (John William Sublett)" is deeply rhythmic, knotty post-bop with a killer Raghavan solo. "Ceaseless Inexhaustible Child (Cyntoia Brown)" features Cold Specks' gloomy soul vocal as the voice of its subject (a young woman imprisoned for life at the age of 16). She sings above a near-gospel melody ringed with processional piano, bluesy guitar, and Akinmusire's wailing, soaring, near-joyous trumpet as a contrasting second voice. "Recall for Those Absent" (a roll call of the names of young black men killed by police and read by a child) gives way to the free quintet interaction of "J.E. Nilmah (Ecclesiastes 6:10)," appended by a chamber piece, "Inflatedbyspinning," for flute, bass, and string quartet. The 16-minute live closer, "Richard (Conduit)," is kinetic, spiraling jazz. It crosses modal, free, and post-bop terrains and everyone gets ample room to solo. The Imagined Savior Is Far Easier to Paint is provocative: its moodiness, myriad musical directions, and 79-minute length may be initially off-putting. What is revealed with repeated listening, however, is that this set's achievement is commensurate with its ambition. --- Thom Jurek, Rovi

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