

The Jazz Crusaders - Old Socks, New Shoes...New Socks, Old Shoes (1970/2008)

Wpisany przez bluesever
Piątek, 10 Luty 2017 13:43 -

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01. Thank You Falettinme Be Mice Elf Again 02. Funny Shuffle 03. Why Do You Laugh At Me 04. Jackson ! 05. Rainy Night In Georgia 06. Golden Slumbers 07. Jazz! 08. Time Has No Ending 09. Hard Times 10. Way Back Home Drums – "Stix" Hooper Guitar – Arthur Adams, Freddie Robinson Piano – Joe Sample Saxophone [Tenor] – Wilton Felder Trombone – Wayne Henderson

Old Socks, New Shoes...New Socks, Old Shoes was the final album by the Jazz Crusaders. Immediately thereafter they dropped the word "jazz" from their name, leaving them the Crusaders and most of the rest is history. This killer set was released on the Chisa label in 1970 and distributed by Motown. While the Jazz Crusaders had long made then-current popular songs part of their repertoire, and had moved from their hard bop origins into the soul-jazz groove years before, this disc was a shock, and sounded like a different band -- almost. For starters, pianist Joe Sample moved over the Rhodes for the majority for this date (he is still one of the greatest voices on this strange, imprecise instrument), and along with drummer Stix Hooper, saxophonist Wilton Felder, and trombonist Wayne Henderson, guitarists Arthur Adams and Freddie Robinson helped out on bass and guitar, respectively. The Jazz Crusaders soul-jazz sound slid on over to an early version of jazz-funk, without sacrificing any of its emotionally engaged interplay or melodic foundation. Still, hearing the two electric guitars, a fat, nasty electric bassline, and Sample's big chunky funk chords signaling the beginning of Sly & the Family Stone's "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" as the album's kick off must have made fans do a double take -- until the horns kick in. It's trademark Jazz Crusaders there. The front line of Felder and Henderson with those near patented breaks of Hooper's would assure all that despite the electricity, the group was onto something new, different, and as greasy and soulful as they had been in the past. This is one of those forgotten Crusaders albums, being on the seam of their transition. Even Pass the Plate, which followed on Chisa, was better known than Old Socks and has been served by history a little better.

Henderson composed four tunes here and Sample one, and Felder's "Way Back Home," a live

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staple for the group, closed this set out. Henderson's tunes are the real stand-outs of the originals. "Funky Shuffle," with its slippery backbeat and alternating guitars before the rolling horns and Sample's all-over-the-keyboard chord voicings give the wide base for the melody. It's a subtle but addictive track with lots of compelling tonal colors -- and fine breakbeats by Hooper. Two other selections are gorgeous and very innovative readings of pop tunes: the version the Crusaders did of Tony Joe White's "Rainy Night in Georgia" is rumored to have brought tears to the songwriter's eyes when he heard it. Sample plays both Rhodes and electric harpsichord on the tune, and Freddy Robinson's whispering blues fills turn a Southern soul number into a textbook exercise in arrangement and melodic improvisation. "Golden Slumbers" by Lennon and McCartney functions with the melody side in the chart from the very beginning, but the harmonic engagement of Henderson and Felder brings the mournful, sleepy intro some real melancholy as Sample, Adams, and Robinson color the entire center with quiet movement and shading before Hooper's drums kick it into gear and still it remains a ballad of stirring soul. Just before the recording ends, there's a wildly different and uptempo arrangement of "Hard Times," which became the group's soul theme on subsequent studio records and on the wonderful live LP Scratch. This one feels more defiant, more resilient, where the latter versions are all longer and dig deeper into the slow soul and blues bags. It's easy to love them all, but this is such a contrast to the others that it's worth noting. The set closes with another group standard: Felder's beautiful, midtempo shuffle "Way Back Home," that offers the same punch that its subsequent studio and live recordings does. It's pure soul-jazz and the evidence of the great experience this already seasoned unit has in allowing everyone to shine simultaneously in the most minimal of arrangements. Despite the fact that many serious jazzheads see this as the beginning of the creative end for the Crusaders, they are just plain wrong. This is the start of a new beginning, one that would roll on through most of the '70s and bring the group its greatest commercial and radio successes and makes them such an excellent source of inspiration and samples for hip-hop and dance music producers for another couple of generations. This is an absolute classic. [The Crusaders '70s music brought such joy to so many people, it's a wonder this album was not available on CD in America until the 21st century. Verve reissued it as part of their excellent Originals series.]---Thom Jurek, AllMusic Review

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