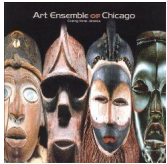


Art Ensemble of Chicago - Coming Home Jamaica (1998)

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1. *Grape Escape* 2. *Odwalla Theme* 3. *Jamaica Farewell* 4. *Mama Wants You* 5. *Strawberry Mango* 6. *Villa Tiamo* 7. *Malachi* 8. *Lotta Colada* Musicians: Bahnamous Lee Bowie - Keyboards Lester Bowie - Composer, Drums (Bass), Flugelhorn, Trumpet Malachi Favors - Bass, Bells, Composer, Percussion, Whistle (Human) Roscoe Mitchell - Bamboo Flute, Bamboo Saxophone, Bells, Chimes, Composer, Flute, Piccolo, Sax (Alto), Sax (Baritone), Sax (Soprano), Sax (Tenor), Whistle (Human) Famoudou Don Moye - Bells, Bendir, Bongos, Congas, Drums, Maracas, Percussion, Tambourine, Timbales

From the looks of things, the Art Ensemble's first studio album in roughly six years was recorded under vacation-like conditions -- on a resort-like compound in Bonham Springs, Jamaica during winter 1995/96. Saxophonist Joseph Jarman had long since departed, leaving Lester Bowie, Roscoe Mitchell, Malachi Favors and Famoudou Don Moye to bask in the Caribbean sun, with more than two months of studio rehearsal time (courtesy of the Odwalla juice company) to use up. Accordingly, the whole album seems to have a relaxed, carefree, even at times lackadaisical feeling, best when celebrating AEC's good fortune ("Grape Escape"), worst when dragging through the mostly torporous "Malachi." At 12½ minutes, "Mama Wants You" is the central work, consuming about two-fifths of the playing time. With a bebop frontline opening, Moye's unpredictable drums signal an eventual disintegration into free near-chaos before landing back in bopland down the stretch. They attempt some off-kilter reggae on "Strawberry Mango" (Bowie's son Bahnamous kicks in some uncredited rhythm piano on this one) and half-hearted calypso on "Lotta Colada"; otherwise, local color is kept at arm's length ("Jamaica Farewell" bears no relation to the Belafonte hit; it's just a brief collective recitative). In other words, this AEC working holiday is not going to push many envelopes. --- Richard S. Ginell, Rovi

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