

Steve Colson "The Untarnished Dream" (Silver Sphinx)

"A superb release from an important pianist/composer/thinker who deserves a wider audience for his thought-provoking work."

To view article on web: <http://www.jazzchicago.net/reviews/2010/QuickHits4.html>

Former Chicagoan - pianist Adegoke Steve Colson's first album since 2004 - *The Untarnished Dream* - is a superb example of modern jazz writing and performing. Mixing post bop with free forms, Colson's compositions are interesting yet quite melodic and his keyboard work is intriguing. On the new release, the veteran pianist is backed by a great tandem in Miles-alum bassist Reggie Workman and drummer Andrew Cyrille, as well as his wife - singer Iqua Colson - who also provides the excellent lyrics. Despite being one of only a few pianists in the AACM lineup, Colson has flown somewhat under the radar - and that is a true shame, because he is an exceptional player and composer. Iqua also is a compelling singer and lyricist - who adds much to this album. Of course, it is always a pleasure to hear Workman and Cyrille, and this nicely-balanced recording captures the group's sound very well. On the robust opening bop track - "Circumstantial" - Colson plays it straight and hot with Workman supplying a nice bass solo, while the moody "Digression" introduces Iqua and veers into Andrew Hill territory. The lovely "Waltz for Iqua" returns the group to piano trio territory and highlights the exceptional interplay between the members, as well as showcasing Colson's unique voice on the instrument. So many pianists these days have a similar sound - so it such a pleasure to hear one who - although he is clearly aware of the great the tradition - is taking his instrument into new directions.

First recorded back in 1980, "Triumph of the Outcasts Coming" gives Cyrille an opportunity to open the piece with a strong solo, and seems to be the centerpiece of this rewarding album. For someone like Colson, who has been active in the Civil Rights movement and in promoting African-American culture, the election of Barack Obama has to be seen as a triumph - not ignoring the fact that the struggle does continue - and the timing seems right to revisit this excellent composition. Colson's piano work here adroitly presents the battle with his angular avant garde lines leaping across the keys. "Maybe" takes things back into exciting and more-traditional sounding Jazz, while the music swings back into free jazz on "Parallel Universe." This dualism is exhilarating for the listener. The title track wishes beauty to everyone and features a great, albeit irregular melody (perfectly captured by Iqua), "Warriors" is a virile piano solo that clearly shows Colson's masterful command of the piano. The haunting "And it Was Set in Ivory" metamorphoses into a middle-section of improvised shakers, bells and chimes before returning briefly to the vocal/bass/drum and piano theme - ending the album with a heartfelt cry for the plight of the Africans who are victims of war and repression due to the pursuit of their natural resources. A superb release from an important pianist/composer/thinker who deserves a wider audience for his thought-provoking work.