



JAZZ

**ROVA::ORKESTROVA 2003
ELECTRIC ASCENSION
Atavistic ALP 159 CD**



Coltrane's *Ascension* has, like his *A Love Supreme*, long been something of an unassailable summit in jazz history, but as any seasoned mountaineer will tell you, there's no such thing as an unassailable summit. *A Love Supreme* has after all already been scaled by Branford Marsalis, and Nels Cline and Gregg Bendian released an extraordinary version of *Interstellar Space* a while back, so it was only a matter of time before somebody got round to tackling *Ascension*. And what a spectacularly good job the Orkestrova has made of it. Joining ROVA's core members – Bruce Ackley, Steve Adams, Larry Ochs and Jon Raskin, on, respectively, soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxes – are Chris Brown on electronics, Otomo Yoshihide on turntables and electronics, Ikue Mori on drum machines and sampler, Nels Cline – the same – on electric guitar, Fred Frith on bass, Don Robinson on drums and violinists Carla Kihlstedt and Jenny Scheinman. Wait, *Ascension* with violins? Yes – and it's a master stroke too: where the Coltrane original was a heaving, turbulent horn-heavy affair, this version, recorded live for KFJC FM in Los Altos CA on February 8th 2003, opens the windows on to a landscape of bright colours and variegated textures that keeps the music fresh and buoyant right through its heroic 64-minute span. The individual and ensemble performances are simply inspired, from Ochs's opening tenor broadside onwards, and the whole glorious edifice is underpinned by Frith's marvellously spacious and melodic bass work, which keeps the flame of the original tiny modal cell burning brightly even in the wilder moments. These, when they come, are indeed noisy and ebullient, but genuinely ecstatic rather than par-for-the-course free jazz big band blowouts. Instead of jumping in and blasting the place to pieces, it's as if the musicians are floating above, able at all times to grasp the overall structure. The duo battle between Raskin's baritone and Otomo's turntables builds with ferocious intensity but remains a *jeu de notes* (Stravinsky), not a pitched battle, and there's plenty of room for the koto-like pizzicatos and Robinson's airy percussion work (what would Elvin have made of it, I wonder?) and the inevitable ensemble tutti is all the more powerful for it.

I like to think that if Coltrane had lived long enough to incorporate live electronics into his music, especially if performed by players as talented as Ikue Mori and Otomo, he would have done so without a moment's

hesitation. The otherworldly textures of the electronics and the Radulescu-like spectra of the violins are perfectly in line with his all-encompassing vision of a planetary music. If the technology had been around at the time and this had been recorded in 1970 instead of 2004, I'll hazard a bet it would now be mentioned in the same reverential breath as The Celestial Communication Orchestra's *The Seasons*, Schlippenbach's *The Living Music*, and the spate of recordings made by Sun Ra on tour in Europe at the end of the 1960s. It's that good. A mighty disc – don't miss it.—*Dan Warburton*

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