



DOWNBEAT August 2010

**Rova Saxophone Quartet/
Nels Cline Singers
*The Celestial Septet***

NEW WORLD 80708
★★★★½

Record labels might not have a problem developing the next high concept, but today's musicians are usually too preoccupied trying to scrape together a living wage to think big. You can't fault the Rova Saxophone Quartet for fearing to tackle the grand idea. The same goes for guitarist Nels Cline, whose twisted and hum-bucked tribute to Andrew Hill stands as one of the great high-concept recordings of the past decade. Since 2006, Cline's trio and Rova have been joining forces on projects like the saxophone quartet's *Electric Ascension*.

Big ideas and big sound. When Cline and his cohorts, bassist Devin Hoff and drummer Scott Amendola, add their sonic heft to Rova's multi-reed phalanx, the result is a highly textured wall of noise. They bring that to bear sparingly throughout these five compositions, most effectively at the climax of Larry Ochs' dramatically layered and segmented tribute to Albert Ayler, "Whose To Know." On Steve Adams' stuttering "Trouble Ticket" the horns blend in rich-if-thorny harmony to counter the Singers' skronky outburst, and on Ochs' brief "Head Count" Rova forms a processional worthy of Sun Ra's Arkestra behind Cline's layered guitar hysterics.



Best of all, though, is the coiled restraint the ensemble brings to Amendola's rearrangement of his composition "Cesar Chávez." With Hoff providing a variegated line that burbles and throbs like one of Jimmy Garrison's rainbow-hued solos, Ochs and Cline explore a range of tonalities, culminating in a combination of spectral guitar and squawking tenor as Amendola splashes around with abandon.

There is much to explore here, and no shortage of high emotion and ecstatic release.

— James Hale

The Celestial Septet: Cesar Chávez; Trouble Ticket; Whose To Know; Head Count; The Buried Quilt, (68-58)
Personnel: Bruce Ackley, soprano, tenor saxophone; Steve Adams, alto, soprano saxophone; Scott Amendola, drums; Nels Cline, guitars; Devin Hoff, bass; Larry Ochs, tenor, soprano saxophone; Jon Raskin, baritone, alto, soprano saxophone.
Ordering info: newworldrecords.org