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🏠 Review: Spyro Gyra – A Foreign Affair

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Sep 12 | 09:00   **Jeff Daily**

A musician is a seeker interested in exploring the limits inherent in their chosen genre. These journeys start at home then extend out to other cultures rich with melodic ideas and rhythms. **Sypro Gyra** saxophonist and chief composer **Jay Beckenstein** has taken his band all over the world playing their brand of smooth fusion, and now the world is coming out in his music. *A Foreign Affair* is the product of seasoned jazz players traveling the globe with ears wide open.

Unfortunately, those hopeful of hearing a true fusion of American jazz and sounds from all corners of the earth are going to be let down. This record is still firmly indebted to **SG's** past bag of tricks. Only with the rich language vocalization on *"Khudu"* does the affair truly turn "foreign". The composition titles do accurately reflect world travels, but this is not world music per se. Sometimes *A Foreign Affair* becomes the **Weather Channel's** *Greatest Hits*.

The soft island funk of the album opening *"Caribe"* does rhythmically what a listener might expect from this band and/or genre, and that's about it. Smooth melodies and improv don't really take anyone away to the Caribbean on this piece. Later, the band delivers *"Antigua"* to listeners, which has the appeal of bad incidental music cut from **Cocktail**. The best moments here are the rhythmically challenging *"Shinjuku"* and tunes that veer towards traditional like *"Last Call"*. The after hours feel of *"Last Call"* is music that captures a certain sensation one feels when the bars are closed, but it doesn't seem like time to go home.

Ambitiously aiming for the kind of jazz that can contain the whole world is indeed grandiose. **Spyro Gyra** are skilled musicians, improvisors, and craftsmen, but the mark has been missed with *A Foreign Affair*.

Final Words: *Spyro Gyra play spin the globe, sometimes landing on Rand McNally.*

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Jeff Daily is a musician and writer who lives in Austin, TX with his artist wife and elderly cat.

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