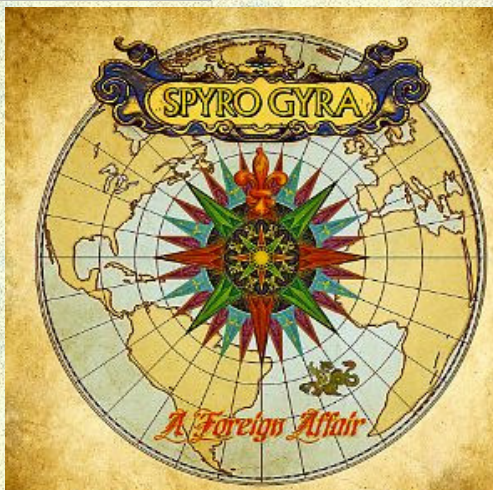
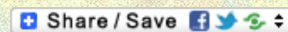
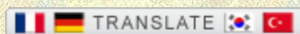


FAME Review: Spyro Gyra - A Foreign Affair



A Foreign Affair

[Spyro Gyra](#)

[Amherst Records](#) - AMH16611-2

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
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Jay Beckenstein, co-founder, saxist, and a main writer in the steady stream of excellence that is Spyro Gyra, possesses one of those unique instrumental voices impossible to mistake for anyone else. More, he's ever written and played with a sense of zest proven to be the keystone to the ensemble's breathtaking chart successes. It's now 35 years since this blockbuster band smacked the world in the ear, and if you think this might admit to a perhaps jaded evolution, think again: their four recentest releases earned a Grammy nomination each. *A Foreign Affair* explains that rather impressive status nicely.

The band has matured after three and a half decades while losing not an iota of the original spark that put smiles on faces and samba steps in gaits. This factor isn't missed anywhere, especially not in semi-co-founder keyboardist Tom Schumann's colorative palette (and I say 'semi-' because Beckenstein and Jeremy Wall are the true founders but were so enamored with Schumann that he quickly became the third member and has remained through every release). Julio Fernandez, when he steps out, shows himself to be a marvelous guitar player somewhat along the lines of Steve Khan, dexterous to a deceptive degree, fluid and breezy, but note-perfect in his choices. The main stage, as ever, is Beckenstein's, and the guy never fails to deliver—in *Falling Walls*, for instance, trotting out an entrancing klezmeresque solo that later arabesques into a cool breeze on a Gobi Desert night.

In fact, this CD is meant to be a melding of a number of world influences without being a world music release per se, the unique Spyro Gyra jazz sound subordinating everything into a hallowed trademark formula, succeeding brilliantly (and catch the funk beat as the song enters its last movement, yow!). Though this may well be the first time Hindi lyrics have appeared on an entire song in the West, yet the tune, *Khuda*, reads a smoothly as a Michael Franks cut, when that ribald songster is serious, or perhaps a Kenny Loggins late period number. More, near the end of the disc, Keb Mo appears to comp Danny O'Keefe's *Last Call*, and any time an O'Keefe song appears on anything, it's reason enough to get the release...but then the CD closes on the jumpin' *Dancing on Table Mountain*, slipping its ultra-catchy rhythms into the dessert menu, as all and sundry retire from the romp sated, satisfied, and smiling, player and listener alike.

Track List:

- Caribe (Jay Beckenstein)
- Khuda (Chowta / Ahmed)
- Sweet Ole Thang (Bonny Bonaparte)
- Falling Walls (Julio Fernandez)
- Shinjuku (Tom Schuman)
- Chileno Boys (Broza / Rios)
- Saba for Two (Tom Schuman)
- Cancao de Ninar (Jay Beckenstein)
- Antigua (Jay Beckenstein)
- Last Call (Knobloch / O'Keefe)
- Dancing on Table Mountain (Scott Ambush)

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