



Spyro Gyra - A Foreign Affair

The first songs I heard from the jazz band Spyro Gyra contained an international flavor. Those two cuts, 1978's "The Shaker Song" and "Morning Dance," which dropped the next year, incorporated the sound of the Caribbean. "The Shaker Song" sported an Afro-Cuban sound, and "Morning Dance," with its steel drums, had a Calypso feel. So when I heard the steel drums on "Sweet Ole Thang," a cut of Spyro Gyra's latest CD *A Foreign Affair*, I felt a connection to those days when I first got introduced to the group. The cut's bouncy Calypso beat and jaunty horn work both make "Sweet Ole Thang" the track on *A Foreign Affair* that is most reminiscent of the classic Spyro Gyra sound.

The songs on this record are – as the title suggests – influenced by band's international travels. The tunes reflect a growth and evolution in Spyro Gyra's sound over the band's nearly 40 years of making music. Cuts on *A Foreign Affair* cull sounds from Japan, India, Brazil, Guatemala and the good old US of A. With all of those international influences, it might be tempting to call *A Foreign Affair* a world album. However, the record is firmly rooted in American jazz. Jazz conventions such as improvisation can be heard throughout the record. "Khuda" is the one number that comes nearest to being classified as a world music song. "Khuda" features lyrics sung entirely in Hindi. Added to the track's east Asian feel is a melody that seems to unwind slowly like a snake charmer working his magic to put a cobra in a trance. "Shinjuku" merges the sounds of classic Japanese music with the jazz feel that is popular in a place like Tokyo.

While "Sweet Ole Thang" best captures the sound of 1970s Spyro Gyra, the band frequently mines the sounds of the Caribbean, Mexico, Central and South America on *A Foreign Affair*. "Cancoa de Ninar" with its deft acoustic guitar playing gives the record a bossa nova feel. "Chileno Boys" is one of the three songs featuring vocals. The track fuses a Mariachi sound with jazz and tells the story of the dreams of a group of young fishermen. The song's chorus – "not different from you" – lets listeners know that the dreams of young men are the same all over. In a way "Chileno Boys" sums up what is appealing about fusion and about the Spyro Gyra's music. The ease in which the band amalgamates different international influences on *A Foreign Affair* is a reminder of why we call music the international language. **Recommended**

By Howard Dukes

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