

PREFORMER MAG

Birdsongs of the Mesozoic — *Extreme Spirituals*
Produced by Birdsongs of the Mesozoic
Engineered by Michael Bierylo and Erik Lundgren
Assistant Engineer: Chuck Sokol

Birdsongs of the Mesozoic teams up with gospel virtuoso Oral Moses to create an inimitable, syncretic niche in the modern musical diaspora. Their idiosyncratic blend of well-composed, electronica-enhanced prog-jazz, for lack of a better term, defies categorization. Truthfully, the only genre that would possibly allow Birdsongs to define themselves as authentically such would be the jazz community. Birdsongs couple minimalist arrangements with eclectic, electronic accompaniment. The blend makes for an eccentric sound that is oddly appealing to the uber-prog audiophile. For those who prefer straightforward music, look elsewhere. You won't find this album at Wal-Mart. The musicians who make up Birdsongs — Michael Bierylo, Ken Field, Erik Lundgren and Rick Scott — have varied and distinguished resumes. Their music can be heard anywhere from contemporary chamber performances in Cambridge, Massachusetts to Sesame Street.

There is a distinct homage to a familiar, American folk tradition on this album, but it's the tradition that's recognizable, not the harmonies. Atlanta-based guest vocalist Oral Moses belts in a rich baritone Black American standards like "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," but the accompaniment truly may as well have been written in the Mesozoic period, or perhaps the distant future. Imagine American Gothic in pastels. This is not art for your living room; you're more likely to find it at the MoMA.

The vocals rarely deviate from their traditional melodies. The accompaniment, however, seems impulsive, exploring various related motifs and some very unrelated motifs, often atonally. When paired with Moses' precise singing, the unique sounds of Birdsongs come across as random, despite the fact that these talented musicians composed nearly every note heard on the album. The amalgam that is the final product doesn't really click. The disparate sounds of Birds and Moses don't mix very well, and the listener is left with the urge to separate the two and hear them in proper context.

It's impossible not to admire what is happening on this album, as the two entities of Birds and Moses are independently noteworthy and commanding within their genres. Together, however, the sound is altogether arresting in a totally different way. (Cuneiform Records)

www.birdsongsofthemesozoic.org

-*Mitchell Maddox*