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The Mahavishnu Project - Return To The Emerald Beyond

The reincarnation of a fusion masterpiece

The original Mahavishnu Orchestra, who single-handedly defined jazz-rock fusion and ascended its highest peaks in the early 70s, had two distinct phases. The Mk I five-piece dealt in molten jazz and rock at phenomenal speed and volume, recording three albums and an unreleased fourth within three years. The lesser-known, more eclectic Mk II, expanded by strings and brass, boasted prime achievements in the fully orchestrated Apocalypse with George Martin in 1974 and the almost more ambitious Visions Of The Emerald

Beyond (1975). Like nothing else, Visions was astonishingly diverse, influenced by 20th Century classical music, Indian traditions, funk, soul, visceral prog-rock and fusion, and yet was also incredibly cohesive. It was also rarely, if ever, performed live.

Drummer/bandleader/ composer Gregg Bendian's Mahavishnu Project treats the MO records like classical repertoire deserving of fresh interpretation and revival. After five years of performing Mk I's material live, this is both Bendian's biggest challenge and his finest hour. Every track has been exquisitely re-scored and developed to greater length for an 11-piece band, yet none outstay their welcome. It's a masterpiece of ensemble playing, with mostly authentic 'period' sounds sounding totally fresh and exciting. Apparently John McLaughlin himself is a fan. Rightly so: his legacy is in the safest of hands.



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Reviewed by Colin Harper

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