



NthEntities – Anna Le, poems/ Phil Manzanera, music – 2012 Expression Records EXPCD30 [Distr. by MVD] ***:**

(Anna Le – Poet; Phil Manzanera – Guitars, Piano, Keyboards, Harmonica, Bass, Kaoss Pad; Yaron Stavi – Elec. Bass, Doublebass; Mike Boddy – Drum Programming, Kaoss Pad, Additional Production; Gilad Atzmon – Tenor Sax Solo; Javier Goyes – Percussion)

This beautifully packaged release is a flat-out masterwork. Former Roxy Music guitarist supreme Phil Manzanera attended a British performance by the gifted poet Anna Le at a Talking Revolution Series event dedicated to Jimi Hendrix. A Hendrix biographer also present suggested to Phil that he put music to her words as a studio project. So impressed was he with Anna Le's performance that P.M. jumped at the idea. The poetry was then laid down in one take at Phil's studio. He later composed various musical settings based on the themes. The end result is some of the most staggering, intellectual, adult and mature product ever to emerge on the rock scene. The arrangements go perfectly with the high-level poetry, making a fully realized document.



First, a long festering rant. For over 40 years, Phil Manzanera has produced some of the most glorious guitar sounds in rock music. His work with the profoundly influential and barrier breaking Roxy Music was impeccably perfect. Without his contributions Bryan Ferry & Co. would never have reached the same heights. His later work with Quiet Sun, 801, Eno, John Cale, Nico and others should have secured his stature as a axe titan. He releases superb solo material to this day. But *Rolling Stone* doesn't even give him a spot in their list of top 100 guitarists. (This the same *Rolling Stone* that did a ten-page piece on James Brown covering dozens of songs without mentioning the one that is in the top five of any hard-core Brown fan: "There Was A Time".) Another list out there of the top 200 guitarists doesn't include him even though some of the selections would make some physically ill. For a final injustice, there are music insiders and even magazine editors who actually confuse him with Ray Manzarek of The Doors.

Back to this superlative release. Anna Le is reminiscent of a female Amiri Baraka. But I think her prose might actually be even better as it is more all-encompassing. More concerned with the overall economy, markets, bankers, the disenfranchised, social injustice, war and the reasons for it, and even the tragic destruction self-administered by the over-privileged. A viewpoint expression not so much based on race as overall awareness.

So the poetry is indeed top flight. But it is what Manzanera composed to accompany it that is easily just as majestic. Over and over he demonstrates the feeling and versatility he has shown over the decades. From simply lovely to melodic to gentle to massive distortion effects to anger to reggae to soul to Latin.

Track one addresses social injustices, including the following: "Whilst the vitals, nurses and teachers performing miracles are barely remunerated, all the while, bankers and footballers performing inconsistently are paid so conspicuously and oh too ridiculously". Great stuff like this abounds throughout the album.

Track two concerns the state of the music and entertainment industry with all its unfairness and ass-backward values. To include over-privileged celebrities partying themselves to ill health or death. Manzanera adds a perfectly matching hedonistic-sounding guitar solo at the end.

Track four is the astonishing tribute to Jimi Hendrix. Anna Le researched the legend extensively before writing the tribute prose – as she did with tributes to Lee “Scratch” Perry and Stevie Wonder on later tracks. Manzanera essentially plays a Hendrix-inspired 7:20 solo on the Hendrix number, along with reggae guitar for Perry and basing the accompaniment for the Stevie track on a well-known single. Present day colonialism and its grave impact is the theme for track six. PM plays an angry punk Clash-like guitar and the cut includes a war-mongering sample from George W. Bush.

Track ten is spoken word only. It addresses so much that is wrong in this world. So stupefyingly, basically wrong with our entire value system. Anna Le pleads that poisonous bankers with their financial innovation be stopped before it’s too late, but fears the message is “not received”.

P.M. reprises his Hendrix-derived playing on bonus track eleven. Both the original and the reprise take utilize such nice sonic effects that I’m sure Phil’s earlier sound manipulator Mr. Eno would approve. The last track is a gorgeous Latin-influenced instrumental of the opening cut with strings, completing the very pleasing atmosphere.

This very high quality release, issued in classy bound book form with all the poetry texts, should make many realize how empty “rap poetry” is compared to the real thing with masterful accompaniment – both from an ace guitarist and the other high-level contributors. But it won’t. People are too busy to set aside the time to listen to this very distinguished and singular disc. Just a little bit over an hour’s worth. Sadly, the potent message will probably end up “not received”.

TrackList: All The While, Cali’s Cautionary Tale, My Nth Entities, Jimi, Lego Limbs, The American/British Dream, Mountain Top Dreaming, Scratch, Vowel Play. Bonus tracks: SOS, Jimi Reprise, The Wonder Of Wonder, Music All The While.

—Birney K. Brown

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