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Al Di Meola - Morocco Fantasia

Film Reviews

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Since exploding onto the jazz-fusion scene in 1974 with Chick Corea's fabled Return to Forever quartet, Al Di Meola has become recognized as one of the world's most technically accomplished guitarists, a harshly exacting bandleader whose music is brilliant but not for everyone, even many jazz buffs.

Di Meola has received a great deal of tough criticism from purists. Sometimes dissed as "all technique, no soul," Di Meola certainly never played bebop very much. And in fairness, given his subsequent immersion in Brazilian, flamenco, gypsy and North African musical traditions, it's inaccurate and perhaps unfair to assess him as a jazz musician *per se*.

This DVD/Blu-ray captures a live performance by Di Meola's World Sinfonia sextet at the 2009 Mawazine Festival in Rabat, Morocco. Supplemented with rehearsal excerpts and street performance, the concert footage is heavily interspersed with a somewhat obtrusive, Peter Max-meets-MTV concept. An unrelenting cascade of images from the Moroccan street and waterfront meld into kaleidoscopic arabesques, and the quick-cut hyperkinetics may be distracting to some.

Among the international cast of heavyweight sidemen is Brazilian Fausto Beccalossi. Di Meola, with some justification, has been accused of glossy coldness, and Beccalossi, whose accordion often sounds rather like a harmonica, warms things up with a much-needed human voice.

The sheer virtuosity and creativity of Di Meola's band is undeniable, and his hard-core fans will undoubtedly love this release. Others, even the most receptive and open-minded, may not find it overly accessible.

-Victor Verney



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