

# Free Planet Radio | New Bedouin Dance

## Smoky Mountain News

### Chris Cooper

Okay, so this is where I usually start my review with a semi-humorous, smartypants observation about something musical. Frankly, the “humorous” and “smartypants” descriptions may just be optimism on my part. Anyhow, the disc and musicians I’m going to talk about are deserving of much more than the usual treatment, so I’ll just get on with it.

New Bedouin Dance is a gorgeous listening experience. This isn’t much of a surprise considering the musicians involved. Chris Rosser, River Guerguerian and Eliot Wadopian are three of the most important and talented players in the Asheville music scene, to say the least. All have studied at some of the more prestigious music schools in the country, and each has combined this learning with gobs of natural ability, years of gigging and wide ranging musical interests. These are three players that actually compose and perform music, as opposed to impressive displays of skill that carry little emotional or compositional weight.

Rosser engineered the project at Hollow Reed Studio, and his skill in capturing great sounds and performances certainly rivals his abilities as a musician. Clear, warm and lush are starting points to describe the mix. One thing that must be noted is that this is a “worldly” album, meaning that much of the music and instrumentation is a kind of fusion of varying cultures- be it Indian, Afro/Cuban, Asian, Moroccan, rural folk or modern jazz. Those of us with ears tired and jaded by Western pop music will find an oasis of rhythmic and harmonic complexity to float around in. Even those listeners wary of anything labeled “world” would do themselves a service by listening- you rock and metal guys that want to hear how to make 7/4 time groove, or want a clear lesson in using non-western sounding scales (Pelog, Phrygian Dominant or Lydian flat 7 anyone?) will find it all and more here.

The first track, “Garden of the Beloved” is a nine-minute journey through rhythmic modulation and pleasantly ear-perking harmony. Having seen Rosser live several times, I was expecting vocals, astounding alternate tuned acoustic guitar and introspective lyrics. What I got was an emotional experience not unlike hearing Bill Frisell’s Nashville or Ry Cooder’s A Meeting at the River for the first time. No vocals, just rich, colorful music that moves between sweetness and melancholy, rural and worldly. It’s effortless and hypnotic- you still hear it after the tune ends.

“Bodhisattva” is a mere two minutes in length, and as well recalls some of Frisell’s simplicity and willingness to bring different worlds of music together so comfortably you’d think it had always been that way. One feels the warmth of a southern back porch evening, possibly looking out over a view of...Pakistan, maybe. “New Bedouin Dance,” the title track, is reminiscent of early Pat Metheny and Keith Jarrett (as the liner notes state), and again moves as stealthily through Weather Report inspired jazz as it does globe spinning harmony- and none of these combinations ever feel forced.

“Radio Asheville” brings some of the instruments back to our “comfort zone”, employing Wurlitzer electric piano, traditional drum kit and electric bass, along with oud, dotar and melodica. The track is also culled from a one-take improvisation after an all day studio session, showing that these guys can truly just sit down and jam. Rosser’s inspired, angular piano lines and the funky, confident groove of Wadopian and Guerguerian remind you that all are high caliber players that communicate with each other on a nearly psychic level, musically. There’s a certain Flecktones quality to the main melody that’s quirky and fun. Wadopian’s “Alap For Parshuram” and Guerguerian’s “Holly’s Groove” are mostly solo pieces, the first dedicated to one of his teachers, the latter an intense rhythmic study that moves through five different time signatures. Ouch!

The last cut, “Logic And Logos” is described as a collage of two sonic experiments, and there is little need to add much to that. There’s an atmospheric, almost soundtrack quality to the track that lets the album fall away peacefully to an end, again leaving the listener almost unaware that the music has stopped. It’s a feeling a bit like waking up from a dream.

So, and not to gush uncontrollably about it, this CD is simply amazing. It wasn’t at all what most people may have expected (myself included), and what a welcome surprise it is. Music like this is good for us- it’s healthy to find a piece of art to lose yourself in, because invariably you come out with something, be it a feeling or understanding, that you didn’t have before. Go find this album and get lost in the world for a while. It’s a nice place. 5 big fat stars all around.