

## **Veritas Vampirus**

“Talking to the Sun”, the opening track, first seemed to promise a kind of Sinatra gig, singing and sprechgesang, and I thought “Okay, since this is a tributary disc, memorializing Abbey Lincoln via interpretive covers, that, uh, that seems to fit”. Little did I know what I was in for. No sooner did the second cut arise, “Another World”, and bassist Rodney Jordan, who plays VERY close to the ground and is actually, you realize as the album progresses, dueting with Schenck, especially here (drums and piano enter in later): she on vocals, he on a muscular bracing street-conversational contrabass.

Then pianist Kevin Bates inserts an almost Cage-ian damped set of keys in a fashion I've never quite heard before, seeming at times to be a second bass, an electric one, on a Di-Meola-esque mission. And it's in this song that Lincoln's poetry becomes rhapsodic in Schenck's hands...er, vocal chords, spinning a story meant to envelop and enchant the listener. “Being Me” is very Nina Simone, but “The River” is the most arresting among the many variegated cuts, a 9-minute controlled freak-out, guest alto saxist Kebbi Williams going apeshit from start to finish (on one cut only, dammit!!!), Schenck attitudey, confident, and slippery.

Remember all those old Rabbit Ears Storybook Classics records for kids, the LPs with the cool actors (Jeremy Irons, John Gieldud, etc.), actresses (Glenn Close, Susan Saranson, etc.), and jazzbos (Mark Isham, Bobby McFerrin, etc.)? Well, “The River” is like those...except as recorded in an asylum where the inmates suffer from over-amplified sideways aesthesia resulting in a joyous chaos: poetic, nutso, and captivating, everything centered in the tale of a river on the freeway. I suspect more than a few precocious young creatives will get a huge grin in listening to this, struck by its unconventionality while festooned with the kind of intriguing vocal squibs kids dig the hell out of. Art Linkletter, I'm sure, is turning in his grave.

“The River” sees Schenck as a grinning madwoman vodun, a schoolroom sorceress who has to turn her face every so often so that no one gets she's loving the whole schmear. Meredith Monk & Joan Labarbara, as you undoubtedly can tell, are ghost presences... and then everything gets normal again with “Learning to Listen”. There's a great piano solo by Bates in “Throw It Away”, and Marlon Patton is the true rhythm section throughout Aminata. Jordan oft joins him, but when he lets loose, which he does any number of times, he's having artful conversations with Schenck.

Of course the antecedents I noted in 2015 (Peacock, Feather) remain in her delivery, as well as all the above, but then, when things turn wry, add Ken Nordine (the Word Jazz cat), Ben Sidran, and Dave Frischberg. I don't where Schenck found Williams but I hope to God she returns him to her next effort...and maybe even ponders a strict trio outing: just her, Jordan, and Williams. That would be a unreal. Meanwhile, my neck's doing better, and, luckily, my chiro, like me, is an unreconstructed hippie and has informed me that bourbon is one of the best muscle relaxants on Earth, soooooooo as I put Aminata Moseka on for a second go-round, I have just the thing to discover a new dimension to it all...STRICTLY for medico-journalistic purposes of course! Bill Clinton didn't inhale, and I don't swallow, yet somehow we're both tweaked. An AMA study is probably in order..

— **Mark S. Tucker, *Veritas Vampirus***