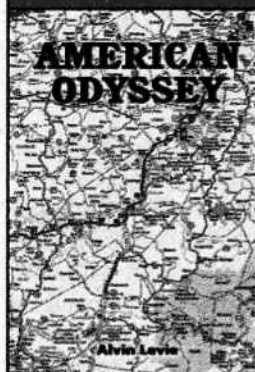


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MUSIC

Quartet for the End of Time

BRIAN MORTON

DAVID S. WARE

When David Spencer Ware was a baby, his mother pronounced a blessing over him. *Go See the World* became the title of the saxophonist's first major-label record, for Columbia. Now, his new three-CD set suggests that he may have taken her mission statement a step further. It's possible, of course, to read

a title like *Live in the World* in two ways. On one level it's straightforwardly descriptive—these are live dates recorded in Switzerland and Italy. But it also sounds like an injunction not to overlook the near-at-hand.

That might strike an unexpected note for those who know—or think they know—Ware as a remote, otherworldly artist. The inside jacket of *Live in the World* (Thirsty Ear) features a passionate prayer to Lord Ganesh, one of the five principal Hindu deities. And Ware has long had a penchant for allusions to the cosmos, karmic responsibilities and occult rhythms. But let's be clear: However mystical and spiritually inclined, David Ware is also profoundly committed to the basic mechanics of jazz music, its nuts and bolts, and its history. This is, after all, a man whose absorption in Eastern religions and Vedic astrology is balanced by a passion for the race cars he used to watch throwing up dust around Plainfield, New Jersey—a spiritualist who has spent much of his spare time shooting his rifle at target ranges.

A casual exposure to some of Ware's earlier records—*Flight of I* (1991), *Third Ear Recitation* (1992) and *Earthquation* (1995) or the titanic *Godspelized* (1998)—might lead you to think that his work merely picks up where John Coltrane left off. The fact that Ware has worked for the past fifteen years in the same format as the classic Coltrane quartet—tenor saxophone, piano, bass, drums—does little to dispel this impression. Not surprisingly, he is often described as a latter-day exponent of the restless, questing, avant-garde jazz of the 1960s known as Fire Music, and as an heir to its Holy Trinity—Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders and Albert Ayler. It's an association that irritates him, despite his abundant admiration for these musicians, because his think-

ing has evolved beyond their often troubled investigations and because his influences are much more various and also more traditional in nature.

Listen closer to Ware's stentorian tenor and you will hear unmistakable echoes of Coleman Hawkins and Ben Webster, the two figures who arguably gave his instrument its authority as a solo voice in jazz. You will also hear echoes of that great 1960s eccentric, the multireedist Rahsaan Roland Kirk, who was especially fond of those bastard children of the saxophone family, the manzello and the stritch, and who was among the first musicians to call jazz "black classical music." Playing those uncertainly pitched horns, as Ware did in his early solo efforts, might have been a creative blind alley. Kirk's cultural pride certainly was not.

Yet these influences go only so far in explaining Ware's art, which comes from a place deep within, the result of constant practice and experiment rather than evenings studying old *Impulse!* records. It was not until the mid-1980s, when he was well into his 30s, that he developed his mature style—comparatively late for a jazz musician. The era of high-velocity, cacophonous loft jazz was coming to an end, and Ware began deliberately to slow down his previously dense harmonic thinking so that the contours of chords and the dramatic topography of a song could emerge from the mists. No longer interested in simply developing his own version of the extreme chromaticism and microtonality associated with Coltrane, Sanders and Ayler, he started to analyze the basic intervals that make up jazz and to re-examine their role in his improvisation, in search of a musical language that was still profound and expressive but also more straightforward.

At the same time, he began to rethink jazz's use of standard song forms, much as Coltrane did with his extraordinary decon-

Brian Morton is the co-author of *The Penguin Guide to Jazz* on CD.

