

Music Review: Sa Ra- Nuclear Evolution: The Age Of Love

Sa-Ra's world of trippy and transcendental R&B seduces the brain with pages from funk's historical past footnoted with global audio-memories. Om Mas Keith, Taz Arnold and Shafiq Husayn are a singular voice fixated on an axis of cosmic funk, jazz and R&B that makes them mavericks among the scene of dogmatic soulsters. Disparate experiences with Africa Bambaataa, Mobb Deep and Ice T coalesced in 2000 when they became one and commenced to produce and write for the likes of N.E.R.D., Jill Scott, Erykah Badu, Common, Dr Dre and Diddy. The brand names and underground affection from Gilles Peterson have given them industry credibility but artistically they did best on the Platinum Pied Piper's first album and their own release on Hollywood Recordings two years ago. They fall in with some of the best post Prince followers including Meshell Ndegeocello, Van Hunt, J*Davey and Dam-Funk the five of them being a cadre of urban artists who embrace the funk envelope and in Meshell's case knocks it off the table after folding it into a kite. They prefer individuality instead of innovation by recasting and reclaiming sounds they fell in love with as twenty-first century P-Funk. "Spacefruit" begins Nuclear Evolution with cool Afro-Brazilian pop jazz recalling Sergio Mendes and it immediately sets their usual sonic buoyancy in place. A heavenly grip with the past manifests in "Love Today," a piece of transported sparkle and soul of '70's funk and R&B with a wonderful tribute to The Temptations' bass singer Melvin Franklin and soaring overdubs of emotional longings wrapped in disco. "Cosmic Ball" is where they take the fusion steelo of Weather Report and carry out swing angles producing more evidence that many roads lead back to Miles with the help of Gary Bartz's lilting saxophone that also assisted Miles with the Cellar

Door band. "My Star" is the only song that resembles an appeal to the urban music departments of conventional record labels. Erika Rose's waterlike vocals could substitute for any of the unremarkable radio geared singles from the ongoing production line of marginally gifted female R&B singers. Rozzi Daime has better chemistry with them first heard when she sang on "So Special" and now when she adds dreamy hotness to the panoramic lust funk in "Gemini's Rising." The palpable fun they have with remaking funk into their own form is endless but they still manage a straightforward tribute to one source when they do a decorous cover of Sly Stone's "Just Like A Baby." No one will be able to recapture the layers of Sly's madness in the drugged out muffled audio of the original but their cleaner version is another flower in Sly's hat because the love for him is evident. Melodies operate as lights blinking across "Powder Bump's" keyboards to emulate the vim of Detroit techno with a minor coldness that comes from the absence of vocals. When you unstuff all the funk throwbacks and ambient soul what emerges is an auricular separateness that defines Sa Ra, which means Children Of God, and makes *Nuclear Evolution: The Age Of Love* a gateway drug for their next output.