

October 14, 2005



Review Courtesy AllAboutJazz.com

Native Lands

Calhoun | Half Note Records

By John Kelman

The Calhoun referred to on the cover of *Native Lands* is Will Calhoun, best known as a drummer with the mega-selling, genre-busting but hard rock-oriented Living Colour. For some, being part of a critically and commercially successful group would mean an opportunity to live the high life. But for Calhoun it's provided the means to travel the world, studying the music of disparate cultures. And just like Living Colour's flamboyant guitarist, Vernon Reid, some would associate Calhoun with rock--but the truth is that he's always had a finger on the pulse of the jazz community.

The visibility of Living Colour has also given Calhoun a certain cachet, resulting in collaborations with jazz artists like Jack DeJohnette, Marcus Miller, and Wayne Shorter. He's even released a relatively straightahead jazz disc, 2000's *Live at the Blue Note*. But even that's not the whole story. He's collaborated with hip-hop artist Mos Def and continues to explore the meeting point of technology and tradition on projects with bassist Doug Wimbush, including *Jungle Funk*, their trio with vocalist/percussionist Vinx.

Native Lands is the first recording to commingle so many of Calhoun's musical concerns. Sure, some tracks lean a little more heavily one way or another, but despite its inherent eclecticism, the album hangs together as narrative whole. The acoustic quintet on Mongo Santamaria's "Afro Blue"--featuring saxophonist Pharoah Sanders, trumpeter Wallace Roney, bassist Buster Williams, and pianist Orrin Evans--may be as pure "jazz" as it gets, but even so Calhoun's kit work weighs more heavily towards the African side of the equation than Elvin Jones ever did playing it with John Coltrane.



Track Listing: Afro Blue; Pyramids; Naked; Nefertiti; Ancient One First Born; Tateich; Umoja; Emanation; She; Three Card Molly; Push; Dorita; East; Native Lands; Echoes of Elvin.

Personnel: Will Calhoun: drums, drum programming, loops, bass, keyboards, sonic textured ambience, acoustic flange drums, Nigerian udu drums, piano, acoustic guitar, pandero, Indonesian flute, ambient sonics, Native American double bell flute, electronic percussion; Pharoah Sanders: tenor saxophone (1, 2, 3, 4, 7); Buster Williams: acoustic bass (1, 7); Wallace Roney: trumpet (1, 2, 4, 6, 7); Orrin Evans: piano (1, 4, 7), electric piano (12); Kevin Eubanks: guitar and loops (2); Antoine Roney: soprano saxophone (2, 10); John Benitez: bass (4, 10, 12); Tateich Calhoun: drums (5); Marcus Miller: bass (6); Cheikh Tdiane Seck: strings (7); Stanley Jordan: guitar (11); Gregg Maret: harmonica (12); Mos Def: piano (13); Nana Vasconcelos: shakers, glass udu drum, hand drums, bells, voice and indigenous percussion (14).

CD Review Center
Upcoming Release Center

Despite immediately shifting gears into the funk and fusion-based “Pyramids,” featuring guitarist Kevin Eubanks in flat-out Hendrix mode, a general continuity of personnel ties the first half of *Native Lands* together. Sanders’ edgily lyrical solo on the multitracked chill piece “Naked” is a standout, while Roney joins him on a reading of Wayne Shorter’s “Nefertiti” that blends ambient electronica with looser improvisational flair. Calhoun’s udu drum may give “Umoja” an ethnic vibe, but Sanders, Roney, Williams, and Evans suggest a contemporary jazz sensibility. Together they bring together seemingly dissimilar ideas and make them speak with a single voice.

The second half of the disc is even more catholic, from the electronica of “Emanation” to the innocent folksiness of “She,” with Calhoun on acoustic guitar and pandero. Calhoun’s cover of Elvin Jones’ “Two Card Molly,” featuring saxophonist Antoine Roney and bassist John Benitez, swings hard but is quickly replaced by the pan-culturalism of “Push,” Calhoun’s duet with guitarist Stanley Jordan that brings together everything from drum programming and loops to Indonesian flute.

The CD comes bundled with a DVD containing informative interview footage with Calhoun and music videos based around select CD tracks and additional material. Proof that living in a diversity of musical worlds can create its own focus, *Native Lands* is an intriguing album by Calhoun--an eternal student who clearly views all music as world music.