



Zawinul

Joe Zawinul ▶ Speakers Corner/Atlantic ▶ 180g LP

Recording ★★★★★ Music ★★★★★

Before Joe Zawinul formed Weather Report he played keyboards on *In a Silent Way*, Miles Davis's first foray into fusion and thus the start of his 'electric' period, and in the early days this was the style of Zawinul's Weather Report albums. As you might imagine this was not his first foray into recording, Zawinul came from Austria where he worked with European musicians in the fifties before moving to the US in 1959, spending most of the sixties accompanying Cannonball Adderley.

In 1970, Zawinul gathered a large contingent of musicians to make this album, these included Herbie Hancock (electric piano), Hubert Laws (flute), Woody Shaw (trumpet), Wayne Shorter (soprano saxophone), Miroslav Vitous (bass) and Jack DeJohnette (melodica, percussion). Both Shorter and Vitous went on to become part of Weather Report. The recording, made between August and October, involved a total of 14 musicians. This is just about evident on what is a rather murky recording; you can tell that there are a lot of instruments involved, but picking out which ones are at work is not always clear.

It is however a key element in the evolution of fusion and a distinct contrast with the work Zawinul did with Weather Report. He was a leader in the style of Charlie Mingus rather than Miles Davis, a listener rather than a lead player in the band and a man who knew how to bring immensely talented musicians together

in such a way that what they created was greater than the sum of the parts.

The album starts with 'Doctor Honoris Causa' which is dedicated to Herbie Hancock's honorary doctorate, which might lead one to expect said pianist to take a lead role in the piece. But no, the tune starts in the Weather Report style with a vibe created by burbling percussion, bass and keys. It's worth noting that most of the five pieces on Zawinul involve two percussionists, notably Joe Chambers and Billy Hart, both giants in their field. This near 15 minute piece starts off fairly quietly but it's not long before the brass section blasts through the fug in piercing style which makes you wish that there was a bit more dynamic range in the recording.

This theme repeats itself at intervals and after a while one is reminded of *In a Silent Way*, albeit things here are a bit more intense as there are multiple horns rather than one. The sound gradually builds between these outbursts and you can tell that there are two electric pianos in action with Zawinul on the left keeping his head down and letting the band do the heavy lifting. Herbie does get his moment toward the end, that doctorate was clearly an achievement for anyone in the field at the time.

The side finishes with 'In a Silent Way', subtitled 'Impressions of Joe Zawinul's days as a shepherd boy in Austria', so not Miles' version at all. Which becomes clear early on with

melodic keyboards from Hancock over both bowed and plucked basses, Vitous and Walter Booker, alongside some strange sounds which may be the echoplex mentioned by Davis in his sleeve notes for the album. These also mention the "clear funky black soprano sound" which is a reference to Earl Turbinton and Wayne Shorter but has he goes on to mention "Joe sets up the the musicians so that they have to play like they do." An indication of Zawinul's abilities in directing what often seem to be improvised pieces.

The second side opens with 'His Last Journey', a quiet introspective piece about Zawinul's grandfather's funeral on a cold winter day, with a restrained trumpet and bells both high and low that paint a very real acoustic picture. 'Double Image' is a rather more extravagant affair that builds using contrasting tempos and colours into a maelstrom in the free jazz style, the drums really ramp up to build an intensity that is only reined in by horns restating the theme, it's quite a journey. *Zawinul* ends with 'Arrival in New York', a title that's reflected so accurately that one wonders how the sounds were created without recourse to a tape recorder in the docks. Fog horns and industrial percussion create the energy and overwhelming impact of landing in a vibrant city. It's a fitting end to a record that showed the world what Joe Zawinul was capable of.

Jason Kennedy