

Copernicus - 2011 - "Cipher and Decipher"

(69:46, Moonjune Records)

★★★★

TRACK LIST:

1. Into the Subatomic 5:21
2. Free at Last 5:17
3. Mud Becomes Mind 5:14
4. I Don't Believe 5:53
5. Matter Is Energy 4:55
6. Comprehensible 7:53
7. Infinite Strength 6:38
8. Where No One Can Win 8:05
9. Step out of Your Body 5:12
10. The Cauldron 15:18

LINEUP:

Copernicus - poetry, vocals; synthesizers
Pierce Turner - Hammond, piano; vocals
Raimundo Penaforte - viola; vocals
Larry Kirwan - guitars; vocals
Rob Thomas - violin
Thomas Hamlin - drums
Fred Parcells - trombone
Matty Fillou - saxophones
Marvin Wright - bass; percussion
George Rush - tuba; contrabass, bass

With:

A few more musicians

Proclusion. Please click [here](#).

Analysis. Released 26 years after his debut album, "Cipher and Decipher" is a production that documents pretty well just how similar yet how different the combination of spoken words backed by instruments can be. In the years that have passed Copernicus have developed as an artist in some ways, one of them being that the material appears to be somewhat less improvised. I suspect that it is the words rather than the music that have taken on more of a planned format however, as the backing music still appears to be at least partially of an improvised nature. The voice of Copernicus is still the key feature, but at least on this occasion it is without the sheer emotional impact so evident when he first started out. However, he's still an impressive narrator, and he knows how to twist and turn his delivery to convey different moods expertly. From a technical point of view that part of the proceedings is arguably at a much higher level on this album. But the sheer passion of the moment isn't that much of a presence, and without that dimension, the overall impact isn't as effective. And in some cases, like the jubilantly jazz-oriented *Step out of Your Body*, the voice and music just don't go easily hand in hand either, perhaps because Copernicus, for all his skills as a narrator, may not have a voice suitable as a part of a positive musical context. The elongated, loosely assembled musical backdrop of *The Cauldron* isn't that much of a happy marriage with Copernicus' voice either, as I experienced this piece, although I suspect those paying close attention to the lyrics may find this particular item much more intriguing than those who, like I do, focus on the music. Still, as long as you enjoy Copernicus' dramatic narrative style there's still quite a lot to enjoy on this disc. The smooth jazz rock backing on opening piece *Into the Subatomic* works rather well in fact, and even more so when his instrumental partners flavor the proceedings with more of a late 70's Pink Floydian sound on the following *Free At Last*. I do suspect that "Cipher and Decipher" may in fact have a broader appeal than his debut album, due to the less intense mood and atmosphere explored on this production. But those with a desire for music of a more challenging nature better seek out his first rather than his most recent disc.

Conclusion. Copernicus does explore a universe very much of his own creation, this time around with a skillful but somewhat detached yet dramatic narration as the key feature, backed by musicians that tend to seek out a style close to improvised jazz for the majority of these pieces in terms of style, with a slight touch of art rock here and chamber rock there. It is the voice and spoken word that dominate, however, and as such this CD is first and foremost recommended to those who enjoy skillful narration on top of a musical

backdrop, especially if you enjoy improvised, jazz-oriented music within such a context.

OMB=Olav M Bjornsen: *March 4, 2012*

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