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The Waitiki 7 - Adventures In Paradise [Pass Out Records, 2009]

The press release for the album *Adventures in Paradise* states that Waitiki 7 is the only band that is performing Exotica live and acoustic, just like it was in the 1950s. They are the rightful heirs of Denny, Lyman, and Esquivel. Randy Wong, one of the principle co-founders used to go see Arthur Lyman play the vibes as a child. Lopaka Colon, who adorns the album with colorful bird calls, follows in the footsteps of his father Augie Colon, who used to do the same for Martin Denny's albums. They have lived and breathed with this music, and as such, it is not merely hipster irony or pastiche that urges them to resurrect this incidental music, but rather a burning passion.

Adventures in Paradise utilizes most of the sonic signatures of Exotica: bird calls, vibraphones, animal noises, latin percussion, and ukulele, performed with jazz and oriental flair, drawing from a richer palette that paints a more compelling picture than much of the blanched white-bread sonic excursions around the world. Of the original Exotica, much of it was recorded as background music for seductions or cocktail parties, or to audition new Hi-Fi systems. In short, it was easy-listening, and the emotional range could be rather bland. A lot of interesting experiments and innovations arose from the era, and Waitiki 7 embraces the strengths and weeds out a lot of the chaff. Standards like "Totem Pole" by Lee Morgan, "Left Arm of Buddha" by Martin Denny, and "Mood Indigo" by Duke Ellington, are mixed in with eclectic originals like "Her Majesty's Pearl", a beautiful conversation between piano and vibraphone, "Ned's Redemption", a madcap xylophone ragtime improvisation with slide whistle, and "L'ours Chinois", an oriental-sounding violin concerto that is chilling, but resolves into an upbeat Eastern adventure. They seem to have spent the time wallowing in far-off sounds, getting to know them and how to play them proficiently, rather than merely performing generic stereotyping to make something sound weird.

"L'ours Chinois" is a perfect example of all that is great about these young musicians dusting off all this marginal music. Darkness gives way to light, sour into sweet, as Waitiki 7 takes a journey through all of this Earth's music. Anything goes, as was the case with the original creators of Exotica, but unfortunately the genre got trapped in the miasma of style and cliché, and became a parody of itself. According to Wong, "Exotica just sort of stopped in the '60s".

Waitiki 7 are transcending time and space, resurrecting spectres of vanished musical styles and making them dance on the rim of dormant volcanoes. This is vibrant and exciting music, full of dashing and daring-do, captured brilliantly by the folks at Q-Studios in Somerville, Mass. They are correcting some of the sins of the fathers, namely complacency and commercialism, and making them their own, as is the



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right and privilege of all children. The album is not flawless, the smooth jazz soprano sax of "Ounalao" is a step in the wrong direction in my opinion, but the blood and guts, tears and laughter more than make up for the muzak.

Waitiki 7 are wonderful musicians that are creating exciting worlds and have made one of the most compelling exotica and jazz albums that I've heard this year.

J. Simpson

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