

Records

Weather Report This is This

Zawinul **Wayne Shorter**
Di.lects **Atlantis**
CBS **CBS**

Last year, with the advent of the fourteenth Weather Report album in as many years, the band's two co-founders announced they were taking a break to work on solo projects. Now, a mere month after the release of these solo albums, we get a return to Weather Report. Or do we?

This is This may carry a sleeve photo of Shorter and Zawinul shaking hands (ie, back together again), but the music inside tells a different story. For a start not one composition is attributed to Shorter whereas Zawinul wrote six of

the total eight. Zawinul also took sole charge of the album's production, and even claims a credit for "cover concept." Such imbalances have occurred in the past but never to this extent. Of further concern is Shorter's absence from actual performance. He seems present on barely half the tracks and on one of these, his soloing is overshadowed by guest guitarist Carlos Santana.

But if Weather Report fans may worry about such things, non aficionados should find *This is This* a very enjoyable album by which to make the group's acquaintance. Many tracks have a strong Afro-funk pulse and attractive melodic lines. 'Man With the Copper Fingers,' besides reminding us how well Carlos Santana can play when he wants to, has a backbeat that would grace any good dancefloor.

Side two is definitely the stronger. Here, pieces have a vigour that is lacking from the pedestrian grooving which dulls

the first side's 'Jungle Stuff' and title track.

When one listens to the Zawinul and Shorter solo albums, it becomes even more obvious who is in control of Weather Report these days. *Di.lects* is pretty much a case of the Austrian goes African. For two-thirds of the album's length, hypnotic percussion patterns and African-sounding chants define the music as much as any of Zawinul's keyboards. The predominance of such rhythmic and vocal stylings is all over the Weather Report album too, from its first to final tracks.

Similarly, for change of pace on both albums Zawinul slows the tempo right down to create sweet and sweeping synthesizer melodies that are as tender as anything he's ever written. Try *Di.lects*' 'Peace' and 'I'll Never Forget You' on *This is This*.

Wayne Shorter's *Atlantis* contains music distinctively different. For instance synthesized keyboards, except on the tough and

funky 'Endangered Species,' are conspicuous by their absence. Acoustic piano is used on the other tracks. Naturally the lead instrument is Shorter's saxophone. Usually this is soprano, and when in harmony with flute, the arrangements can become quite light and airy.

Of course Shorter has a long and esteemed reputation as a jazz composer and here, tracks like the title number are characterized by his intense, intelligent writing. (Another, 'Shere Khan the Tiger,' is ironically a piece he once gave to Santana, the guest musician who all but upstages Shorter on the Weather Report set.) If *Atlantis* has a weakness it lies in the last track on each side where the arrangements become over-clever, with the addition of "la la la" female vocals almost reducing things to the level of Shakatak-style cocktail musings. Nonetheless the great majority of the album is very worthwhile.

The question that remains

however is, if Shorter can still create music as strong as the best work here, why isn't he taking more responsibility for Weather Report? Is it just that Zawinul is the more prolific writer or does it involve personalities? Weather Report has always operated like a corporate boardroom in the sense that the more assertive the talent, the greater the say in musical direction. (Remember the Jaco Pastorius years.) Perhaps Shorter has been selling up his share capital. Perhaps the photo on the back of *This is This* represents not so much reconciliation as the shaking of hands to conclude the takeover deal.

For this reviewer a good way to remember when Weather Report really was a jointly led enterprise would be to select the best four tracks from each of Zawinul's and Shorter's solo sets and combine them on one LP. And then to regard *This is This* as being by a new band altogether.

Peter Thomson

Chris Thompson The High Cost of Living

(Atlantic)
Expatriate Auckland leaves his usual gig with Manfred Mann to make a very American AOR solo debut. Track one is a spirited remake of the Motors' 'Love and Loneliness,' while track two is one of those catchy ballads so beloved of FM programmers. From track three on there's nothing really deserving of comment. Rockist redundancy from a skilled singer.

Saxon

Rock the Nations (EMI)

A new album from this lot is hard to get enthusiastic after the last one or two (or three?), but *Rock the Nations* does sound like an improvement. Reverting back to their earlier sound, Saxon blast through these nine songs loudly. Best tracks would have to be 'Battle Cry,' which has some great drumming from talented member Nigel Glockler, and 'Party Til You Puke,' featuring fellow baldie Elton John rocking out on piano. GD

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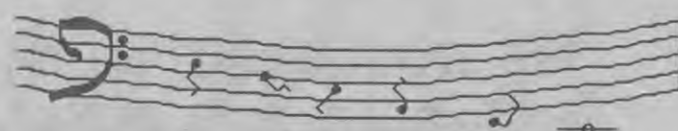
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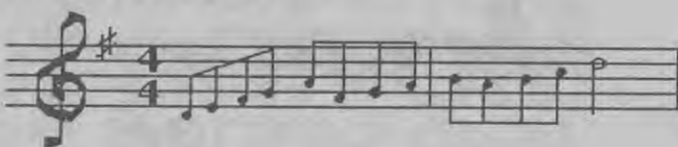


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