

1750 ARCH RECORDS
S-1802

**Randy
weston**
African Rhythms



BLUE

RANDY WESTON
ANCIENT FUTURE / BLUE

RANDY WESTON
17508-2

CD1 **ANCIENT FUTURE**

- 1 Ancient Future 2:12
- 2 Roots of the Nile 5:34
- 3 Kom Ombo 4:31
- 4 Bambara 4:49
- 5 Portrait of Oum Keltoum 4:34
- 6 Ballad for T. 5:17
- 7 Isis 2:20
- 8 Blues for CB 3:11
- 9 PCN 4:36
- 10 It Don't Mean a Thing 2:24
- 11 Body and Soul 4:40
- 12 Double Duke Pt. 1 3:01
- 13 Out of the Past 3:10
- 14 Double Duke Pt. 2 1:21
- 15 Come Sunday 2:36
- 16 Sketch of Melba 4:16

CD2 **BLUE**

- 1 Penny Packer Blues 7:24
- 2 Earth Birth 4:34
- 3 The Last Day 4:46
- 4 Lagos 5:15
- 5 Blue in Tunisia 7:05
- 6 Mystery of Love 5:09
- 7 Ellington Tusk 7:36



2 CD - MUTABLE 17508-2

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RANDY WESTON piano

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**RANDY
ANCIENT**

**WESTON
FUTURE**

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Photo: Carol Friedman

All compositions by Randy Weston.

except It Don't Mean a Thing, by Duke Ellington and Irving Mills;

Body and Soul, by Johnny Green, Edward Heyman, and Robert B. Sour;

Out of the Past, by Benny Golson and Jon Hendricks; Come Sunday, by Duke Ellington.

All compositions published by Black Sun Music, administered for the world by Mayflower Music Corp. (ASCAP)

except, It Don't Mean a Thing (publ. by Duke Ellington Music and EMI Mills Music, Inc);

Body and Soul (publ. by Quartet Music Inc., Range Road Music Inc., and WB Music Corp.);

Out of the Past (publ. by Time Step Music); and Come Sunday (publ. by G. Schirmer, Inc).

ANCIENT FUTURE

Recorded and mixed by Jay Newland in June 2001 at River Music Studio.

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Art direction: Patrice Beauséjour - Design: CB Graphic / Paris

“In African music,” Randy Weston observed in a 1998 interview, “there aren’t the categories of the past, the present and the future. Music is a timeless thing.” He proves it every time he touches a piano or puts pencil to composition paper. Weston descends from a long line of seers who build on what the ancestors left us to create music of startling originality—music of the future. This is why *Ancient Future* (a title lovingly borrowed from Dr. Wayne Chandler’s new book *Ancient Future: The Teachings and Prophetic Wisdom of the Seven Hermetic Laws of Ancient Egypt*) so perfectly defines Weston’s approach to music and life. Like Dr. Chandler’s book, Weston’s music reveals the wisdom of the ancient world, where art, science, and spirituality were one, where music was not entertainment-for-sale but a life-force at the core of civilization itself. Weston demolishes distinctions between traditional and modern, composition and improvisation, enveloping us with what really counts: the music’s spiritual essence. And what better way to capture the spiritual dimensions of this great music than Weston, in his solitude, singing, praying, meditating, shouting, through the medium of Bosendorfer piano which he transforms into a giant talking drum or a 97-stringed kora?

“*Ancient Future*” is a meditation on music’s origins. “I thought about Osiris,” Weston recalled, “when he was assigned to teach man about civilization and he used music to do it.” Spare, contemplative, “*Ancient Future*” is evocative of William Grant Still’s “Africa” (A Poem for Orchestra in Three Movements)” (1928).

“*Roots of the Nile*” and “*Kom Ombo*” were inspired by Weston’s recent travels to Southern Egypt, where the Nubians created a powerful civilization that shaped much of Africa and the Western world. “*Roots*” is a spiritual; each delicate line drifts over a rubato cadence with such sheer melodic beauty it’s as if every note were scored. “*Kom Ombo*,” named after a Nubian temple, paints a vivid image in 6/4 time: Weston’s left-hand is a rumbling, majestic drum chorus while his right hand is a spirited circle of dancers.

“Bambara,” known to many of us as the introduction to Weston’s composition “Blue Moses,” is a musical history of the roots of the Gnawa—descendants of slaves brought to Morocco by way of the Saharan trade. One of the great city-states of the Mali Empire, Bambara was remembered as an ancestral homeland for the Gnawa and a source of their rich sacred music. “Portrait of Oum Keltoum” and “Isis” are beautiful meditations written for great Egyptian women. When Weston first heard Keltoum sing in Morocco in 1969, he was reminded of Mahalia Jackson. “Isis” might be described as a prayer to this great goddess of fertility; in little over two minutes, Weston distills thousands of years of history into an elegant, soulful praise song.

Everything Weston plays is a praise song to the ancestors, especially his musical predecessors. He has absorbed the spirits of all the great “ticklers”—Duke, Art Tatum, Earl Hines, Nat Cole, Monk, all of them. “Ballad for T” celebrates Monk—not just his music but his whole personality. Weston never tries to play like Monk, but Monk’s musical spirit resounds in practically every note. He opens by paraphrasing the first bar of Monk’s virtually forgotten song, “Sixteen,” and proceeds to create an intimate portrait of a great artist who embodies the passion and humor of his music. Likewise, listen to “Blues for CB” and you’ll feel how Count Basie swung his piano and the whole band. Ellington is everywhere, in Weston’s extremely funky two-fisted, foot-stomping interpretation of “It Don’t Mean a Thing.” Part I reminds us of Duke’s roots in the blues, evoking his piano style with those rolling fifths in the bass, while Part II pays tribute to Jimmy Blanton on the left hand, and the orchestra’s tremendous horn section on the right. Here Weston makes more music in less than a minute and a half than many cats make in an hour. In between “Double Duke” Weston plays a warm, poetic rendition of Benny Golson’s “Out of the Past,” a fitting homage to a composer who deserves a lot more attention.

“Sketch of Melba” was written for Weston’s long-time collaborator Melba Liston—master arranger, composer, and trombonist. The beautiful musical relationship they established compares with that of Ellington and Strayhorn. The lush voicings Liston brought to Weston’s

magnificent melodies are captured so tenderly in “Sketch for Melba”; it deserves a place alongside the great ballads: Strayhorn’s “Lush Life,” Thad Jones’s “A Child is Born,” Monk’s “Crepuscule with Nellie,” and Johnny Green’s “Body and Soul.”

Speaking of “Body and Soul,” Weston’s virtuoso performance of that classic song deserves an entire essay. Delivering a fresh, innovative take on one of the most recorded songs in history is not an easy task. Louis Armstrong, Chu Berry, Roy Eldridge, Jimmy Blanton and Ellington, Charlie Parker, Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Tatum, Teddy Wilson, Nat Cole, Monk, and of course the incomparable Coleman Hawkins, each recorded “Body and Soul” and changed the music forever. Weston took the challenge and gave us a rendering that will be studied for years to come. Like Hawkins’s legendary 1939 recording, Weston never fully states the melody but you hear it throughout. Following an absolutely stunning rubato introduction, each whispering phrase builds perfectly on the previous phrase, eventually slipping into a lovely waltz—a meter Weston has mastered. He plays with such spiritual conviction that he succeeds in turning a torch song into a church song. And he is humbled by the implications: “dig the title of that song: ‘Body and Soul.’ Deep.”

“PCN” (which stands for Panama, Cuba, Nigeria) is not the last cut on the CD but for me it completes the circle, the Ancient and the Future. It represents the global movements of African rhythms, the birth place of his father Frank Weston (Panama), the land where Randy first felt African soil (Nigeria), the lands tied together by Yoruba culture (Cuba-Nigeria), the lands where African Rhythms meet and mingle. Listen to Chano Pozo and James P. Johnson do the ring shout in the left hand, or Dizzy’s high life notes in the right hand. Listen to both hands and you’ll hear the fertile imagination of Randy Weston, brilliant pianist, composer, teacher, and medium for the ancestor... our ear to the past, our voice for the future.

Robin D. G. Kelley

Robin D. G. Kelley is Professor of History and Africana Studies at New York University

All compositions by Randy Weston except Mystery of Love, by Guy Warren.

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BLUE

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Randy Weston played a 9 foot Steinway Grand Piano made available by Sherman-Clay, Seattle, Washington.

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“Penny Packer Blues”: When my daughter, Kim, was quite young, she used to wear some large, round spectacles that covered her beautiful face. She already showed the energy and vitality of a natural artist. Her little-girl rhythms inspired this blues.

“Earth Birth”: A song about the joy of the beauty of our planet Earth as seen through the eyes of children. This is nature in its fullest sense—magnificent.

“The Last Day”: That day will come perhaps sooner than we realize. The sky opens up. The Creator appears and all Earth’s inhabitants get down on their knees—the powerful, the weak, the rich, the poor. We humble ourselves and pay our dues for our selfish greed and lack of respect for the planet.

“Lagos”: The year is 1961. I am flying to Nigeria—going to my ancestral home at last. The motors of the plane seem to have a different rhythm. Apprehension... excitement. My true home Africa. I was blessed to have this experience.

“Blue in Tunisia”: A quiet night near the sea... strange moon. Spirit-deep thoughts of my father, who became an ancestor. The color blue... an unforgettable experience on the coast of Southern Tunisia.

“Mystery of Love”: This is a West African version of Romeo and Juliet, written by Guy Warren of Ghana, a master percussionist, composer, and philosopher. I change the melody a little. It’s been my theme song for many years.

“Ellington Tusk”: The mighty Duke Ellington... blues master. With his magnificent orchestra and original piano, he probably created more varieties of blues than anyone.

This album is dedicated to the memory of my father, Frank Edward Weston, who was responsible for those struggling years of piano lessons, and gave me pride, dignity and awareness of true African civilization, a true ancestor.

Notes by Randy Weston

