

China Lake 7:00
(Big Black, Wheaton)

Pavan 4:28
(Wheaton)

Jigs 5:19
(Big Black, Wheaton)

Afro-Cuban Lullaby 7:27
(Big Black, Wheaton)

Trinidad 10:32
(Big Black, Wheaton)



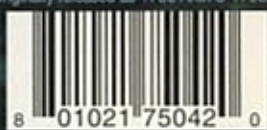
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mutablemusic 17504-2

BIG BLACK • ETHNIC FUSION

BIG BLACK



ETHNIC FUSION

Big Black, tumbas and bongos
Anthony Wheaton, guitar

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BIG BLACK-ANTHONY WHEATON

CLASSICAL-AFRICAN FUSION

Original Liner Notes from the 1982 lp — Philip Elwood

In a recording world nearly suffocating with the monotonous sounds of pre-fab electric "rock," 1750 Arch Records has been like a breath of fresh musical air. They have dared to record "live," and issue unedited renditions; they have presented new sounds, fascinating ensembles and esoteric instrumental experiments.

But even in the rarified audio world of 1750 Arch Records the microgroove disc contained herein must be considered as unusual. Unusual, in fact, that the recording session ever took place; unusual in the sounds that emerge, and unusual in the concept and instrumental collaboration that we hear.

Black phoned. He said "Phil, you write the notes for our record." "Yessir," I replied, "...what record?" Black is not only physically impressive (he is, after all, called "Big" Black) he is also very persuasive verbally.

"Our record — you know what I mean? Our record," Black replied.

Black has syntax patterns very much like his late great friend, Julian Adderly — another big man, but he was called "Cannonball", not just "Big".

"You know what I mean," repeated Big. I allowed us to how I knew what he meant.

In the summer of 1980 I'd run into Black at a saloon in San Francisco's North Beach section. Pharoah Sanders was playing, his band was wailing, there were singers, percussionists and a big, lively audience. Black strode over (he doesn't walk, he strides) squashed my fingers in a handshake, condensed the three years since we'd seen each other in a couple of sentences and suggested that I ought to come by his place on Potrero Hill (in San Francisco) some time soon and hear what he was up to.

"Yessir," I replied. We laughed, exchanged laudatory comments about Sanders (who was playing "See See Rider", avant garde style, at the moment) and Black, whacking my back as a departing salutation, vanished into the smoke-filled room.

"Meet Anthony — Anthony Wheaton," Black said, once I'd walked into the house. No one heard my knocking or ringing of the doorbell. How could they? There were some pretty impressive instrumental sounds ricocheting through the building.

Wheaton, pleasant, attractive and lean, with the unmistakable look of a dedicated artist, nodded to me, thrust out his hand, smiled, and quickly withdrew to strumming the guitar that hung around his neck.

Black laughed. Black's laugh can crumble the sandy plaster that holds 75-year-old walls together. "We're working out — dig?"

I dug.

Black had more than his usual accumulation of drums set on one side of the room. Tumbas, congas, bongos, miscellaneous percussion devices. Black, as usual, was wearing a coarse-thread African shirt that hung over his pants. His hands aren't just large, they're astonishingly muscular. They seem to have joints that the rest of us don't possess, muscles that are unseen by non-fingerdrummers.

Wheaton played his classical guitar constantly. Phrases came, and went; Black would ripple across five drum heads—Wheaton cascaded down the guitar strings. Call-and-response, I thought to myself.

"When I first heard Anthony, I knew where he was comin' from," said Black. "He was comin' from where I was at!" He roared with laughter.

What I heard was a beautiful guitar sound—simple, "classically" influenced, structurally stable: "He's radical in his quest to be different," Black said.

I'm not sure I know what that means but it was said respectfully.

Wheaton it seems, had been playing guitar for some time before a knowing friend suggested that he might find the artistic freedom he was seeking by meeting, and playing with, Big Black.

Wheaton worked in San Francisco's Mission District (nearby) in recreational activities through the city's Art Commission. His guitar is part of his professional life, his personal life, and his soul.

"I think of myself first as a communicator. I communicate in heartbeat rhythm," notes Black. "Anthony was in rhythmic conflict, when we began," Black continued "but our mutual love of the music, and our respect for one another, gradually brought our ideas together. I tried things his way, he did mine — it worked. Neither of us compromised, we just fell-in together.

"When Anthony listens to the old guitar masters, I mean the classical masters, he hears things differently than we do — when he plays he has the freedom of a jazzman but the technique and structure of a classicist."

Black, of course, is the dominant sound on this disc, as he has been on many before it.

Well into his 40's, now, Black is nearly 15 years Wheaton's senior, but, (like all fine musicians I know) his music is ageless. Black, a Georgian, grew up with drum rhythms from across nearby waters—from the Bahamas and from the Caribbean; later from Africa. For over 20 years he's been part of the Afro-American and Caribbean-American musical scene; he's known in South America and a Brazilian residency was in the offing as these notes were written.

I've never known whether Black's personality was projected through his drums or whether the drums conditioned his personality.

I do know that the man is rhythmically possessed.

For me to comment in detail, to comment at all on the intricacies of sounds on this disc would be, to say the least, presumptuous. What I hear and what you hear are likely to be quite different things.

What I hear are marvelous shadings on the drums, brilliant (and considerably more introspective) playing by Wheaton on the guitar. And I hear a wild assortment of rhythms — the bata, wawaco, samba, ska and calypso-reggae beat (among others I can't identify). Black has a solo track, Wheaton often erupts, and at other times seems just to bubble.

The artistic alliance, unusual at first encounter, not only makes sense — it works.

I wish, somehow, that tape-loops (or a disc equivalent), were common in audio reproduction, in the way they are in films.

The music on this disc is continuous — continuous communication.

Continuous African-classical sound-fusion.

It's Big Black and Anthony Wheaton, percussion and guitar.

"Hey Phil, we're gittin' it together — you dig?"

I dug, and I dig.

You will, too.

Produced by Thomas Buckner • Recording supervision by Bob Shumaker

Recorded by Gerald Oshita, using the Mark Levinson ML-5 master recorder, and two Bruel Et Kjaer model 4135 microphones.

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