

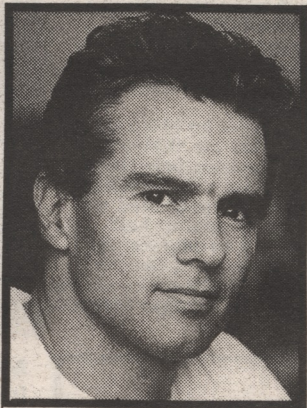
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100 Proof Aged In Soul may sound like a weird malt whisky but they are, in fact, yet another almost-Chairmen Of The Board vocal group, fronted by genuine soul legends Steve Mancha, Joe Stubbs (brother to the Four Tops' Levi and ex-Contours) and Don Hatcher, ex-Parliament collaborator, another Detroit veteran and writer of several Edwin Starr hits.

A superior and subtle soul performer, Mancha gives 100 Proof an edge that Glass House lack. Cuts like 'I've Come To Save You', the epic seduction number 'Ain't That Loving You' and the Womack-esque 'Don't Scratch Where It Don't Itch' are all Invictus as good as it gets.

With 20 sides, there's no shortage of Hot Wax, so get you Afros on and wig out. (7)

Ian McCann



Brook: winging and groovy

MICHAEL BROOK

Cobalt Blue (4AD/All formats)

IF THE words 'structural rearrangement by Brian Eno' fall upon you like manna from heaven, then welcome to your sonic dream. Canadian guitarist/composer Michael Brook, with the help of the aforementioned balding godhead and an alluringly intense pair of eyes, has now found his spiritual home on 4AD. 'Hybrid', his EG-released debut, created dark, percussive atmospheres of a weirdly tribal nature; this second helping is an altogether more ethereal affair, actively rather than passively ambient.

'Cobalt Blue' dances on other-worldly terrain, centring on Brook's dextrous guitar technique, and specially invented 'Infinite guitar' which allows him to sustain a note indefinitely and transform the instrument into a cry from another planet.

Michael is a fully-fledged member of the Ambient Mafia along with Harold Budd, Daniel Lanois, Roger and Brian Eno, a close circle of introspective musicians/composers/producers gently pushing the boundaries of instrumental music and even creating anew the tools to do the job. Brook especially is a sound perfectionist, a guitar scientist searching for the string-driven equivalent of the Big Bang.

Brook shapes sound landscapes and percussive textures in a paradoxical picture show for the ears, 12 global explorations of uncharted mood territory. Opener 'Shona Bridge', with its Oriental feel of impending doom, debuts the juxtaposition of plucky acoustic guitar with the cyberspace 'Infinite' version which is the recurring motif throughout the album. Hahn Rowe's violin enriches the rustic 'Red Shift', Eno's accordion taking it on the pioneer trail, then we quickly visit the Middle East with 'Skip Wave' and its echoes of Gabriel's 'Last Temptation' soundtrack.

'Slow Breakdown' has a string arrangement of achingly sad beauty set against lilting guitar, followed by almost pizzicato-style pluckings weaving and bobbing under Jo Burgess' heavenly voice on 'Ultramarine'. 'Lakbossa' takes those strings into orbit, winging past Robert Fripp, Bill Nelson and Phil Manzanera on their way, spinning past Vini Reilly as they go.

'Ten' reaches a Zen-like perfection of guitars-as-mantra, Brook reaching a transcendent state with his Infinite that takes him preciously close to Nirvana (no, not the three-piece grunge variety). Quirk, strangeness and charm all present and correct.

'Cobalt Blue' deepens its colour along with the midnight sky: prime-time nocturnal noodlings for the witching hour, as wombadelic in its way as 4AD's finest. Save it to savour on an endless night. (7)

Betty Page