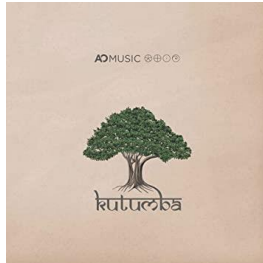


AO Music

Kutumba



Every song is an adventure and it is one of the common traits of the unique sound of **AO Music**. Sometimes they use a chanting tribe, a children's chorus, an orchestra, a single voice, or all of the above. Many of the songs have this dynamic Irish bouzouki and delightful vocalise. They were brave enough to use a banjo once. All of their albums have a common thread of unity, family, and peace woven into a colorful, textured fabric of amazing music. **Kutumba** is no exception. It is a dozen ebullient tracks of World

Music with an international reach that is dedicated to the children of the world. This is the kind of album that takes a village to create. Kutumba means "family".

It would take a page and a half to recognize all the key players for this ambitious work, but suffice it to say that the main characters are Richard Gannaway, Miriam Stockley, Jay Oliver, and Sandeep Chowta along with a host of others, including several children's choruses from around the globe.

Nashu, the opening track is a proclamation that the world is "ours". The Zvony Folk Children's Ensemble sings this modest song with a warm, harmonious intonation. It could be a clapping song, a folk song, or a song just to celebrate being alive. Make no mistake however, the song is richly complex with vocalise, a cheerful tempo, and a message to join hands and sing along.

Mysterious bansuri flute, a bopping cajon (a box drum from South America), and Gannaway's vocal and musicianship mold the melody on **Little Watchers**. There are worlds we can see and many we cannot. Underfoot, beneath the leaves and detritus of the forest floor, are insects, crawlies, and microorganisms that are part of our world as well. Watch where you step. You could be putting somebody's world in jeopardy and that sentiment reaches to all levels of our planet. Environment is everything.

Makale became a favorite right away. Makale, meaning mischievous, the song invokes the legacies of Miles Davis and Charlie Parker and others as their styles and their triumphs added to the worth of man. Whatever comes your way, remember there will always be life and love.

The wind chimes sway in the blustery wind and so begins the title tune **Kutumba**. I never get tired of saying that the music on all of the AO albums is incredible. Their instrumentals just seem to blend perfectly into whatever their song du jour happens to be. Case in point; the main theme, **Kutumba** by Jay Oliver, is a song of movement, of unseen energies, of metaphysical travel. Pick your landscape and begin the journey and Kutumba will be your guide, your compass, and your way back home.

Stockley and Gannaway join together on the exhilarating tune **Into the Trees**. Even with meager syllables, Stockley is able to add poignancy to any note she sings. As with many children, their

sanctuary is the forest. The rocks will protect you. The tall trees stand stalwart, a fortress of uncarved wooden soldiers, as your guards. The children are safe in the arms of the trees.

Lotus is song of respect for the earth and all around you. The poignant tune is sung by Sang Ding Duo Jie who appeared on one of AO Music's previous albums called Asha. His voice is gentle, calming, reassuring. He is the benevolent Uncle Sunny. Through his music we learn not to pick the single lotus flower, but to leave it as such so that others might partake of its beauty and its contribution to the earth's beauty.

The last song, **Final Ascent** is another instrumental whose sparkling assonance and driving score urges us forward, higher and higher. You can feel the winds nipping at you, and feel the cloudy sky promising snow. And you hope you can go the distance. Take heart. You will find the strength to finish the journey, the Final Ascent, somewhere inside you.

There are important lessons to be learned in all twelve tracks of Kutumba. Some are veiled, some are obvious. But they are all there to promote the positive, strengthen the spirit, and give thanks for the gift of life. AO Music sets the tone and the example in each and every one of their albums. And I for one, am never tired of hearing their message. Highly listenable.

- R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews