

Michael Whalen

Our April Tigers

michaelwhalen.com



Our April Tigers, the latest release from multi-award winning composer **Michael Whalen** and friends isn't just a get together with the usual suspects, it's a conclave of the contemporary elite. The lineup for the album includes legendary bassist **Michael Manning** (*The Quantum Activist* Documentary), notable horn smith **Jeff Oster** (*Brothers*), **Michael Brook** on guitars (*Land of Dreams* soundtrack), and **Karsh Kale** on percussion (*Touch*). It is easy to see and, especially hear that among them there is more than a century of musical prowess and it is put to good use on *Our April Tigers*, this electrifying album of seven finely crafted ambient, electronic, and world tracks.

Imagine yourself in an ocean going vessel skimming across an endless, glassy sea. Slow and steady wins the race in the first track **Over Water**. No surprise that Manning's bass has a fluid flow and Brook's guitar becomes the main conveyance over this long distance ride. Whalen's stinging background tempo is the stroke of the movement.

Mr. Kale injects a bit of percussive chaos in the intro to the tune **Disappear**. There's a lot of elaborations wrapped around Oster's horn in this driving ballad. And ballad may be too gentle a word. There's really so much energy involved in this song that perhaps the disappearance cannot be seen from the main theme. This clandestine composition has a frenetic drive that cannot be ignored.

One of my favorites on *Our April Tigers* is **Morning Bell**. Whalen's swirling synth matches movement with Oster's haunting horn that announces the day. This isn't some quiet monastery commencement, this is the beginnings of a day in the life of the world. Bass and horn change positions and creep over the edges of the planet creating light. This is the start of something big.

Visceral Organ is a bit on the funky side due to Manning's jumping bass track and Whalen's twittering context. It put me in mind of some of the eighties bands that had several brass players and the rhythm section took the lead. There's a stomping tempo that gets mixed with Kale's Middle Eastern stylings that drives the whole thing. Hold on for this one.

So Fragile is the lightest tune on the album, but it still has a lot going on. There are layers of percussion on top of steady rhythms and a busy melody that describes many things, including the present condition of our own planet. Oster's horn is slightly muted in the motif that tends to generate a piercing softness.

The song **Hope Haunts** begins with something between a gamelan and a zither. Manring's liquid bass notes flows over everything like honey while Oster's horn sweetens the deal. But it's that dulcimer that get your imagination going. It offers up an Old World feeling in a modern day domain of doubt. Yes, with everything going on there's still room for hope. Always will be.

So we can avoid confusion with the time space continuum Whalen gives us the final tune **Temporality**. Read the word carefully. Whalen's intricate finale reminds that the here and now will always be as important as thinking about the future. The tune is bursting with funky snippets and quirks that are intermeshed with a driving theme of sustained energetic pulses. Reality can be a reminder.

While most composer start out with a little jingle, Whalen's unique outline first and add music later style makes these tracks replete with complexities, but still with a lot of refinement. Mr. Whalen is an alchemist of production and composition, so the whole album, which I understand was created by sending out basic material and having the long-distance collaborators contribute on an ongoing basis, comes out like a finely polished modern day post classical symphony. What are April Tigers? I have no idea. Possibly the musical equivalent of Young Turks. You'll have to decide for yourself. But with this extraordinary collaboration, the listenin' is easy. Excellent album. - R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews