

Paul Speer

Sonoran Odyssey



A sunrise in the desert is like the Earth being reborn every day. It is difficult to capture the act in musical terms, but veteran guitarist **Paul Speer** manages to do just that on his latest release, **Sonoran Odyssey**. The album is ten tracks of highly listenable electrically charged ambience with a bit of synthesized help and the nuances of NASA in the mix. Speer has been a mainstay in the world of instrumental music since the 80s and is a double Emmy Winner and Grammy nominated composer, guitarist, and record producer. He has wielded a guitar since the age of nine and formed the family band at twelve. Years later he ended up as collaborator on a trio of albums with New Age pianist David Lanz. Like a rare few from the heyday of the New Age movement, Speer's crossover contemporary music repeatedly survives the test of time and his latest, *Sonoran Odyssey*, will be no exception. Progressive rock and ambient meld into a thrilling, dynamic trek into musically extreme environs.

The first cut is called **Sunrise** and it is a solitary tune and a great opener for the adventure that is to come. The desert is a place of extremes and the cold, clear night will soon be a heated environment and a place of teeming life seen and unseen. The first muted hint of light swathes the stars pale gold and erases them one by one. The warmth of the day announces itself. Speer's guitar adds rhythmic color and the day begins. The music says get ready for something amazing.

The next several tracks are variations on a theme, prefaced with either Moonrise or Monsoon. The first is **Moonrise (Thunder)** and begins with what Native People called thunder beams and a driving guitar track guaranteed to get your pulse pounding when the storm hits. And it does. The second variation, *Monsoon (No Thunder)* is no less tame.

It appears to me that some of the time, Speer may not be contemplating our moon. **Moonrise (Full Mix)** is a cosmic observation that is perhaps not seen from our planet. Echoing horns herald that this moon is only a reflection, but its brilliance cannot be denied. This is one of the long tunes on *Sonoran Odyssey* that expands your sonic adventure. As a multi-instrumentalist Speer wears many hats on the album. On this track his keyboard skills are deftly brought to bear.

Moonrise (Featuring Neptune) is an ambient voyage across the universe with waves of quavering sonics that travel the longest distance to the planet farthest from our sun. Using manmade musical energy Speer literally taps into the music of the spheres. His spatial music reminds that there is loneliness out there. But there is also light.

There are three bonus tracks on the album. **Behind the Waterfall** is a familiar tune to me. It is the re-imagining of a track that Paul collaborated on with David Lanz on the album called *Natural States*. This version is a little more spunky, but also with a bit more depth. The guitar track carries a heavier weight than the original and I liked it for that. **Venus Rising** features unexpected guest artist **Sherry Finzer** on flute. She offers a vacillating accompaniment to Paul's

very hard driving guitar tune. Venus rotates counter clockwise, a phenomenon offered by no other planet. It is also the second brightest object in our sky. It has been venerated for millennia. The throbbing instrumental suggested to me a primitive dance around the fire while the planet glares in the darkest night of the desert. Take heed. The nocturnal creatures are just beyond your vision. This high energy tune is a favorite.

Space contains sound. The last cut is called **Jupiter Via NASA**. Pulse pounding percussion and flowing rivers of reverberation combine in a haunting score by Speer with a nod to the Voyager spacecraft recordings. The utter eeriness of this fantastic foray is chilling, somewhat frenetic, but quite a memorable tune.

Sonoran Odyssey seems to capture a full day of contrasts in musical terms, from the pale light of a new dawn to the setting of that same sun that leaves you in complete darkness. Speer's sometimes blistering guitar tracks seem to exude their own kind of energy. I enjoyed the entire album for its vivacious, high spirited sound that will transport you beyond ordinary borders. Highly recommended. – R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews