

Café Society (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)
Various Artists (Sony Classical)
 by John Pietaro

As is the case with most of Woody Allen's efforts, the score is vital to the film (now playing). And, as an artist of a certain age as well as a hobbyist jazz musician, Allen's selections are drizzled with nostalgia. But *Café Society*, like *Radio Days*, *Stardust Memories* and others, speaks to the decades of the auteur's childhood. His quest for a storybook past has had arguable results but the soundtracks—usually recordings by celebrated dance bands—turn the visual into the visceral.

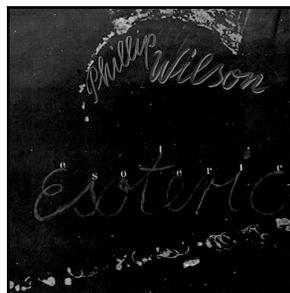
Though *Café Society's* score includes several numbers by Count Basie and Benny Goodman, the CD only offers one each, "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" and "Taxi War Dance", respectively. The other classic cut is "I Only Have Eyes for You" by studio orchestra leader Ben Selvin. The remainder comprises newly recorded renditions of '30s standards. Multi-instrumentalist Vince Giordano is seen in the film (and so is the main focus of the CD), leading a quartet on well-executed, affable versions of "The Lady is a Tramp", "Jeepers Creepers", "Manhattan" and many more. The band is expanded by Kat Edmondson's rather pointed vocal on "Mountain Greenery".

Listen too for "The Peanut Vendor" by YeraSon, a

contemporary Cuban ensemble, as well as pianist Conal Fowkes on "Out of Nowhere" with trio and concluding the disc solo with "This Can't Be Love". The music is era-perfect, but such politely melodic strains don't translate well to 2016 New York. This style didn't go over much with hip musicians of the '30s either.

The greatest irony, though, lies within the title itself. The film takes place in the kind of locales that the actual Café Society was created to denounce. When founder Barney Josephson cast the slogan "The wrong place for the Right people" above the doorway, it was a leftward statement against the racism and classism fortified by high society. Why would Allen name his film's pale uptown mob-run club for this legendary Greenwich Village space? Now, if Allen created a vehicle to celebrate the actual club, the soundtrack would be peerless and the message very timely indeed.

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Esoteric
Phillip Wilson (hatHUT-Corbett vs. Dempsey)
 by Anders Griffen

"Wilson is one of the unsung heroes of the new music," observes Valerie Wilmer in her book *As Serious As Your Life*, "his departure, [from the Art Ensemble of

Chicago] a traumatic experience, apparently, for the others." The late drummer Phillip Wilson was born in St. Louis 75 years ago this month, attending Sumner High School with Oliver Lake, Lester Bowie and John Hicks. In the '60s he moved to Chicago, becoming an early member of the AACM and The Art Ensemble of Chicago before joining The Paul Butterfield Blues Band.

Esoteric is a set of improvised duets with Olu Dara, credited with trumpet and "horn (serpent)", recorded in Paris in November 1977 and May 10th, 1978, just five days before the set that would become Wilson's *Live at Moers Festival* LP. The CD opens with the 1977 session, three tracks, "Lester B. I, II and III", the first a duet and the other two incredible drum solos. "Caul Call! The Eso" sounds particularly West African and between the bells and drums Wilson sounds like he could be at least two percussionists. "The March and Ragtime" has a good dose of humor. Dara's pedal tones on "Elephant Bossa" sound funky and almost electronic; it seems to get cut off after only a minute. "Olu 1" and "Olu 2" are solos for the most part; the combination of the slurs with the mute create an almost bowed-strings effect. Wilson's brush intro on "Lost and Brash" sounds like fireworks crackling in the distance.

Dara works with squeezed notes and slurs, sliding between his voice and the brass, while Wilson explores drumset as well as a range of bells and small percussion. The two deal from a close friendship and personal rapport, which allows them freedom from idiom, including 'free jazz', so they can explore sound and expression with awareness and without self-consciousness. This could be a challenging record for some, but is rewarding and a happy glimpse back to a bygone time and place.

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