

Ahmed Abdullah's Dispersions Of The Spirit Of Ra

*Traveling The
Spaceways*

PLANET ARTS 100324

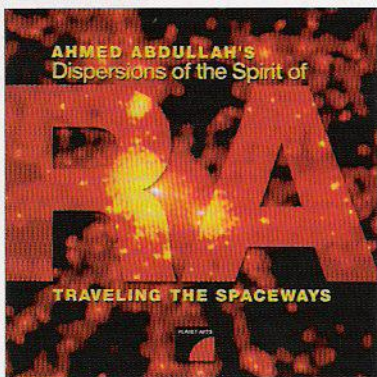
★★★

Ahmed Abdullah's Ebonic Tones

Tara's Song

TUM RECORDS 009

★★★★



Trumpeter Ahmed Abdullah here shows overlapping facets of a rich career as vibrant loft scene native New Yorker and Sun Ra acolyte.

On *Traveling The Spaceways*, his honest, cheerful nonet applies itself to Ra-like traditions of strong musical forces popularized with entertaining splashes of sing-

song vocal, arcane philosophy and Neptune-via-Nubia poetry. You need to imagine the vibrant costumes, choreography and processions; they'd almost certainly be more fun live. The title track spins out Ra's original moody, spacy descending vocal line—with its walking baritone sax vamp—into a gospel-like tour de force for Louis Reyes Rivera's reading and vocalist Miles Griffith's space rant. "21st Century" evolves from gentle chaos into rattling easy to listen (for a hot minute); never sugar-coating the messages, Griffith delivers them with sidewise wit. The band's rambunctious bashes on "Dancing Shadows" and "New Horizons" turn archly cajoling on "Love In Outerspace." Abdullah gets in fine licks: muted wah-wah intro on the hummable "Enlightenment," before Alex Harding's bari supplies chugging humor duckwalking with Billy Bang's pizzicato violin and wacky-smart vocals.

The estimable contributions of Bang and Harding in the nonet are magnified in the Ra alumni quintet Ebonic Tones' broad-stroke brushing of the 1950s on *Tara's Song*: Thelonious Monk's "Blue Monk," a Frank Lowe reggae ("Nothing But Love") and delicate tracery of Gigi Gryce's "Sans Souci." Ra classics "Tapestry" and "Fate In A Pleasant Mood" feature Abdullah's mellow, humorous vocals, and he takes quirky trumpet zig-zags through "The Cave." Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman" gets an epic Mideast makeover with hypnotic rhythm and impassioned, transcendent solos by all front-liners. Bang reacts pensively to the title ballad over bassist Alex Blake's double-stops and Abdullah's Harmon mute trumpet. Every tune in this compelling set bears relistening. The band's bouncy, creative spin revives Ra's unquenchable spirit and gritty worldwide melodies in this provocative mainstream session.

—Fred Bouchard



Traveling The Spaceways: We Travel The Spaceways; 21st Century (parts 1-3); Dancing Shadows; Love In Outerspace; Enlightenment; East Of Uz; New Horizons; They Plan. (70:41)

Personnel: Ahmed Abdullah, trumpet, vocals; Billy Bang, violin; Alex Harding, baritone sax; Craig Harris, trombone; Salim Washington, tenor sax; Owuor Arunga, trumpet; Masujaa, guitar; Radu Oluwu Ben Judah, bass; Cody Moffett, drums; Monique Ngozi Nri, Miles Griffith, Louis Reyes Rivera, vocals and poetry.