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Open circle. Kevin Locke

by Kevin Locke

(Makoche MM0135D CD)

If record shops ever invented a new category of 'hard listening' then it might be filled with works by artists such as Kevin Locke. And a good thing, too. That's not to say Locke - or, to give him his Lakota Indian name, Tokeya Inajin - writes unlistenable music: far from it. His songs for Native American flute and percussion are extraordinary pieces that simultaneously express a sense of fluidity and strength - as his eleventh album Open Circle affirms. That such qualities shine through at all is testimony to Locke's skillful art, for it's long been acknowledged that Native American music - Hollywood-inspired chanting aside - is a 'difficult' sound for untuned ears. Formed out of ancient rhythmical ideas and cadences, the music's structure and aim may not be at first obvious. In a culture where easy access equals survival, 'difficult' music defines itself in adversity. There have been various attempts to bridge the divide, ranging from the sublime (Sioux national John Trudell's rock-tinged take on Native American music) to the ridiculous (all those New Age-inspired synth jobs). Indeed, that Open Circle's sleeve notes state no synths were used in production has a significance beyond the studio. But it is an adventurous album, filled with strange and wonderful combinations of sounds: Siberian bullroarers, Aboriginal didgeridoos, African drums, whistles made from eagle bones and flutes, singers and dancers. The haunting rendition of 'Amazing Grace' which opens the album offers something of the spirit that permeates the proceedings. One may not understand the words of traditional Lakota songs without reference to the sleeve notes but the sense of wonder, and of welcome to all races, is marked.

Politics ****

Entertainment ***

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