

NEW RELEASE

Tisziji Munoz: "Shaman-Bala"

- BY [TOM BOJKO](#)
- Oct 17, 2002

"I've always known music as a way of spontaneously expressing free heart feeling," says guitarist and metaphysical theorist Tisziji Munoz in an e-mail from his home in upstate New York. "Playing music as a broken or wounded heart is a constant characteristic of my heart feeling, or Soul, as some call it."

Munoz' latest album, "Shaman-Bala," which means "strong medicine man," is a sustained explosion of the Soul that will floor any listener who likes it heavy, raw and loud. Recorded live in New York City, it features a former John Coltrane drummer-of-choice, Rashied Ali, Bernie Senesky on piano and Don Pate on bass. At times the quartet channels the music so hard that only Ali's remarkable intuition and sure hand hold it together.

Commenting on the recording, Munoz says, "Every time I play the way that I play, it is an opportunity to be creative and enter the transcendent fire of Spirit. This is easy to do with Rashied and the other cats on the 'Shaman-Bala' CD."

Listening to "Shaman-Bala," one can feel Munoz going deeper and deeper into a sort of immolation therapy. On virtually every tune, his fat, singing tone sears the edges of his trills, glissandi and notes, which he holds a bar at a time as the band rocks on. Particularly impressive is his solo on "Initiation by Fire," which ruthlessly attacks the high register, then suddenly digs into the register below, only to leap back to the highest frets on the neck. On "My Favorite Things" the guitarist leaves behind all known idioms as the notes fly by in a timeless, instinctive cascade. And on "Visiting This Planet" the band improvises off a riff so nasty that it makes most metal bands sound like bubble-gum pop. Throughout this double-album the band lends inventive, visceral solos as they ride along with Munoz, exploring spaces where few musicians dare to venture — and their joy in doing so is palpable.

Although Munoz never had the chance to play with Coltrane, he has clearly absorbed aspects of the great man's thinking through his jamming and recording with Coltrane's musical next-of-kin — Ali, of course, but also McCoy Tyner, Pharoah Sanders and Coltrane's son, Ravi. Speaking of his work with Sanders, Munoz says, "Pharoah just told me to play. Into the fire we would go, and the rest is history. For in the fire, I am fire!"

Perpetually on fire, Munoz is now thinking about his next release, "Divine Radiance," which has already been recorded. The album features Ravi Coltrane, Sanders and Ali, among others, and Munoz says the band is pushing to make a short tour of Japan after the album's release next year.