

## SACRED EARTH – A REVIEW

By E. Connelly

In Sacred Earth, Sanctuary's forthcoming release, a synergy of exotic instruments - add the improbable likes of the dobro, Tibetan tingshas, djembe, and dumbek - alloy into a riveting album of contrast and versatility. Contemplative and imposing, whimsical and enigmatic,

Sanctuary's forthcoming release is the project of Fr. Shawn Tracy and Dan Mason, who compose as well as perform in the twenty-eight original pieces on the two-CD album. The sound is at times Middle Eastern, in one case vaguely Caribbean, and at points, almost Irish in its lyricism. But the rainforest instruments, interspersed with more traditional fare (the ardent notes of a violin, for example, introduce "I Am Filled") eloquently envision a theme of Earth's innate, God-created divinity, one that is both inclusive and nonproprietary.

"Canticle of the Sun," for instance, articulates the circularity of all life and in so doing situates humanity within the more encompassing "circle" of Earth's natural creation. Expansive but not overwrought, and punctuated by a convincing refrain of alleluias, this (very sing-able) piece is ceremonial in its varied cadences. In "The Last Enemy" the ensemble enacts a subtle matter-of-factness as chilling as it is compelling. "Death?" it seems to scoff. "Oh that - not to worry! - that will be defeated." A peremptory "of course" is here implied - and with no space for second-guessing.

"When it Rains" is audacious and agile, on par with the fearfully and wonderfully crafted "We Are Priests" (surely one of the world's only songs to memorialize Melchizedek). Similarly animated is "The Stone," which revisits the storied "cornerstone" of Psalm 118.

The artwork of Patty Smith reinforces a leitmotif of circularity and inescapable continuity. In a series of paradisiacal images so striking and intricate that one is almost sorry to view them in such minute print, Smith vividly evokes a pictorial theme of Earth's sacred unity. Sequenced in the album's accompanying booklet, Smith depicts a Tree of Life cleverly interposed with a vesica pisces; mountaintops and water segue seamlessly into birds of paradise, and more terrestrial creatures frolic amongst brilliant greenery, denizens of a divine, idealized realm.

Divided into two aptly named CDs ("Landscape" and "Seascape") Sacred Earth is uplifting and formidable, fun and singularly well executed. The music's spirit is one of scriptural celebration bound inextricably to a pervasive consciousness of Earth and of life itself.

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