

cd·dvd·book *reviews*

MandoMorphosis

2010

Reviewed by Hermon Joyner

On the surface, the CD *2010* by MandoMorphosis doesn't seem like a likely idea. Each track seems to hit a different genre and the instrumentation is somewhat limited by using mostly mandolins (not that that is a bad thing!). But there's a core strength that carries the music along and unifies it all into a cohesive whole and that is the energy and intensity of the musicians.

This is one energized CD. At the end of it all, *2010* succeeds because of its diversity of material and the passion that ties it all together. This is a winning debut for this mandocentric group, MandoMorphosis.

MandoMorphosis is a collective of seven musicians who all play the mandolin, in addition to other instruments. Just Matt Sircely plays only the mandolin and he is one of the standout performers in the group, though all are obviously accomplished players. Orville Johnson plays mandolin, dobro and guitar. Michael Connolly plays mandolin, violin and guitar. David Tiller plays mandolin and guitar. Pete Frostic plays mandolin and octave mandolin. Adam Larrabee plays mandolin and guitar. And Scott Schaffer plays mandolin, mandola and guitar and also acts as producer.

For each track, a smaller subset from the group performs that number. The musicians and the CD are all about spontaneity and invention — capturing the infrequent creative spark and connection that occurs between musicians — and finding new fertile musical ground for the mandolin. They want to create a new context for the instrument. Along the way, the listener encounters newgrass, old-timey, classical, choro, jamband and even minimalist music. *2010* plays with the various musical genres in a way that teases the listener and pulls them along for an enjoyable ride.

One way that MandoMorphosis copes with the divergent material is to allow the music to flow uninterrupted from one tune to another. This goes a long way towards connecting everything. *2010* begins with a short piece called *Crash*, which is 19 seconds of tremolo-melodic chaos, and then immediately flows into a newgrass number, *Matt's Idea*.

Matt Sircely steps out front in the mix on several tracks like *Matt's Idea*, *Hamhock's Razor*, *Dos Somorgujos* and *Ghostown*. His playing is complex, facile and rich. Definitely a mandolinist to watch.

Other worthwhile tracks feature Pete Frostic and Adam Larrabee on two numbers, the Jacob Do Bandolim tune *Santa Morena* and *Chopin's Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2*. One of my favorites is the deceptively simple and beautiful *Ed*.

MandoMorphosis' *2010* is a stunning collection of tunes. Sometimes it takes you to unexpected places and at other times it lands on familiar ground. But no matter where you find yourself in this recording, you'll be amazed at the subtle musicality and virtuosic performances. Very recommended.

Song List: *Crash*; *Matt's Idea*; *A Minor Squabble*; *Impromptu Redux*; *Santa Morena*; *CrimeDog*; *Zone 429*; *Hamhock's Razor*; *Pete's Wish*; *Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2*; *MandoMorphosis*; *Out of the Furnace and Into the Fire*; *Nero's Fiddle*; *Dos Somorgujos*; *Ghostown*; *Ed*; *Cascadia Raga*