

## Praise for *A Pleasant Fiction*

“Whenever people who know a lot about music are struggling to describe what an album sounds like, that is a positive sign -- at least from an artistic standpoint (as opposed to a strictly commercial or marketing standpoint). Formulaic, cookie-cutter albums are easy to describe and easy to categorize because the person doing the describing has already heard a ton of similar albums. But if the album is difficult to describe and difficult to categorize, that indicates that the artist is striving for originality and isn't afraid to take chances. Singer/producer Percy Howard's *A Pleasant Fiction* is that type of album. If one plays this 52-minute CD (which was originally released in 2004 and reissued in late 2009) for five different people, it is likely to be categorized five different ways. Perhaps the most accurate description is "avant-garde rock with elements of soul, blues, and avant-garde jazz." Leading his group the Meridiem Project, Howard is clearly going for both abstraction and bluesy soulfulness. The performances are, in fact, soulful, but they are also cerebral, abstract, dissonant, and left of center. As R&B-minded as *A Pleasant Fiction* is, there is no way that one is going to hear “Chase the Blues Away” (an unlikely remake of the Tim Buckley song), “Melting” or “Carlotta”\_on an urban contemporary station alongside Usher, Beyoncé Knowles, R. Kelly, or Alicia Keys -- the performances are way too eccentric for that. But then, Howard obviously wasn't trying to be commercial. This is soulfulness for the Knitting Factory crowd; *A Pleasant Fiction* is soulfulness for Nina Simone fans who can also appreciate James Blood Ulmer, Sun Ra, Ann Dyer, and Betty Carter. Howard and his Meridiem Project have delivered an excellent album that yields major rewards, but only for those who can accept Howard's experimentation on its own daring terms.”

- Alex Henderson, **All Music Guide**

“Lyrically, this is an emotional affair. The lyrics deal with stories of good and evil. The poignant and sometimes disturbing stories are presented in various formats, between Jarboe's whispered secrets to Howard's throaty shouts to the falsetto prayers of “Chase the Blues Away”. Vernon Reid and Buckethead's guitar matches the charged emotions with a barrage of grunge guitar, heavy waves of metal or weeping blues.”

“Percy Howard has captained an enjoyable and challenging ride.”

- **Progressive Ears**

“A Pleasant Fiction, the second album by local singer-composer Percy Howard's Meridiem, radiates with an arty, hyper-serious approach to rock once popular in 1980s downtown New York, the kind of music played by people

who head-phoned a lot of Hendrix and then got PhDs. The lineup here is essentially Howard (Language of Dreams/Sway and Nûs), plus a host of guests: Bill Laswell, Vernon Reid, Buckethead, Jarboe, Happy Rhodes and many more. Howard, when he sings (there are a lot of guest vocalists), is a transcendent singer, and the instrumental backing is smart, shifting colors and shades like ever-changing weather. Stylistically, Howard is a multi-genre shape-shifter; the 10 songs here, one a Tim Buckley cover, may be less than memorable, melodically speaking, but their polymorphic virtues shine anyway.”

**- Jackson Griffith, Sacramento News and Review**

“Here he's shooting for more structured "songs", but with a theatrical twist and flavor that reminds me of all those great theatrical rock performers of the past, back thru the glam-rock days of the early 70s (from which evolved the ROCKY HORROR phenomenon), thru the late 60s hell-fire shows of Arthur Brown, all the way back to the original theatrical showman of the mid-late 50s, Screaming Jay Hawkins...”

**- Dan Fiebiger, E-Mail music review newsletter**

“The lyrics to these songs 'give love a bad name' to paraphrase some rock band I'd rather forget about. Love sure ain't no fun, it's full of pain and sorrow. Personally I'm not a real 'lyrics man' but I can appreciate it when they are a little more than just words. The lyrics on this album are well written and poetic and they deserve attention (if they don't ask it themselves, and they do, I think). All in all A Pleasant Fiction is an impressive album. The big names sure help in making people aware of the release, but I don't think you should buy it for the namesake of one person. At least not with the intention to get a fix of that particular person. Everybody is part of the whole and worked for a great collective end result. It's a beautiful ambient rock album with influences from jazz, gospel and blues with a quite unique sound actually.”

**- Martijn Busink, Musique Machine**

“If you dig improvised vocals or instrumentation, you might want to check this band out... Howard has an awesome singing voice...”

**- Jim Corcoran, Dutch Progressive Rock Pages**

“Multiple layers of sounds focus on rhythm, textural electronics, treated vocals. But it's good alternative pop-rock with a hip-hop basis. Very enjoyable and accessible (well, compared to my usual listens...”

**- Monsieur Delire (France)**

“Depending on one's perspective, the breadth of styles in what is termed heavy metal and hard rock (not necessarily extreme music) is a blessing and a curse. The fact that the ambient style has been included in heavy metal's scope is a source of much debate. But if one believes that heavy metal is defined more by

the passion and dedication of the performer then the debate loses its central arguments.

Percy Howard developed the Meridiem project as a way for him to express his classically trained singing style in a more progressive manner – this approach combines ambient, progressive rock, jazz, soul, and classical styles in unique ways. The Meridiem project has been a collaborative effort featuring the talents of many individuals both in and out of the metal and hard rock styles. Percy Howard's Meridiem project includes the likes of Vernon Reid (Living Color), Buckethead (Guns N Roses), Jarboe (Swans), Bill Laswell (Praxis, Herbie Hancock) among many others.

"A Pleasant Fiction" plays out like a soundtrack to a film that explores the themes of love and spirituality as the thrust of the lyrics. The pacing is deliberately slow and unusually quiet – as such "A Pleasant Fiction" is an understated voyage. An unlikely cover forms the heart of the first half of the disc. Tim Buckley's "Chase the Blues Away" is a dramatic revision that is cinematic in development and bombastic in its conclusion. "The East" is the disc's heaviest number in which ambient landscapes give way to a near apocalyptic disintegration. The title track crackles like an untamed fire. "Can I Get A Witness" recalls the gospel-tinged emotion of King's X. Funk gets a turn in "Where You Stand." In all cases the songs bear the imprint of a minimalist approach that allows the imagination to explore the album's themes with open ears.

"A Pleasant Fiction" is for the adventurous music listener that is receptive to new approaches to the progressive rock style."

- **Rough Edge**

"Percy Howard and his Project Band Meridiem has two CDs out there, one from 1998, one from 2000. I have not yet heard them. However his third, A Pleasant Fiction, Meridiem Volume Three (Voiceprint/Pangea) has been grabbing my ears for a week. It is time to report in on it.

Percy gathers together a fairly large group of musicians for this current volume, most notably Vernon Reid, Bill Laswell and Buckethead. Percy Howard does most of the vocals and he has soul. I believe it is Jill Tracy that is also a vocalist here and she contrasts Percy well. There may be others vocalists appearing too, but I don't know and it doesn't matter, really.

What we have is a musical trip that circumnavigates all kinds of progressive, alt and metallic-fusion realms. There is a story line that threads its way throughout and it has a romantic flavor. It is the well-crafted and excellently performed songs that musically stand out. The ensemble is top notch, guitar work notable and everything gels in a way conducive to the ears of 2009. I am sometimes reminded of Kip Hanrahan's imagery of love on the hot griddle. This is in Percy's own bag, though.

The songs are sophisticated and complicated enough that a single hearing does

not do them justice. (And I sometimes wonder what reviewers think they are doing when they react to a recording based on a single listen, if there are any out there who still do that.) Repeated listening reveals the content and puts the songs firmly in the memory. They are the sort of things Carla Bley, Mike Mantler and others pioneered in the '70s, art-rock songs, if you will.

Anybody who wants something with a lot of thought and care put into it, who likes rock but doesn't like the more banal versions, who looks for the edgier forms, would do well to hear this CD at least two or three times, or ten. . . .“

- **GappleGate**

“This hard-to-categorize CD that arrived last summer is the third release for Howard’s Meridiem Project, a collaborative effort drawing on diverse talents like Vernon Reid, Buckethead and Bill Laswell. It is a well-recorded piece of occasionally noisy, occasionally tuneful music. There are quiet songs of almost-pastoral beauty, like “Melting” and “Chase The Blues Away;” and there are spooky, crashing bursts of Crimsoesque noise like “The East.” The pieces with female vocalists are particularly interesting in establishing this movie-like feel. All in all, this cinematic recording is a reward for dedicated listeners.”

- **Mississippi Sun Herald**