



## Tower of Power Soul Side Of Town

MACK AVENUE/ARTISTRY MUSIC 7059

★★★★½

No signs of rust surface on *Soul Side Of Town*, Tower Of Power's first album in eight years.

A shiny mix of taut instrumentals, soaring, medium-tempo ballads and tunes suggesting actual locales and characters, this 50th-anniversary recording affirms the trademarks of the meticulous 10-piece ensemble: a razor-

sharp horn section of distinctive saxophone drama, versatile lead vocalists, song titles demanding the listener join in the fun and just enough variety to avoid predictability.

Bracketed by homages to the group's base in Oakland, California, the album pops from the jump, largely thanks to Joe Vannelli, who co-produced the disc with ToP saxophonist/vocalist Emilio Castillo. This highly polished, well-sequenced collection of 14 tunes invites listeners to the soul side of town, where new lead vocalist Marcus Scott assures listeners that "Everybody's welcome/No matter who you are/It's one big family/And everyone's a star."

In this mythical place, there's no greater pleasure than "Hangin' With My Baby"—as long as you "Do It With Soul." There can be setbacks, as on "Selah," a swaggering track on which Castillo relates a tale of betrayal. But overall, an upbeat atmosphere rules across *Soul Side Of Town*, even on the less aggressive offerings.

Tower of Power's lyrics aren't generally what grabs a listener. It's the groove, exemplified on such stop-on-a-dime cuts as the appropriately crispy "Butter Fried" and "After Hours," a sultry lesson in saxophone interplay and cross-rhythms. Standout soloists include guitarist Jerry Cortez, Hammond B-3 master Roger

Smith and Stephen "Doc" Kupka, a baritone saxophonist of puckish authority who co-wrote the majority of the tunes here alongside Castillo.

The music throughout this program is well-arranged—even on occasion surprising. Touches like Tom Politzer's ebullient flute on "Do You Like That?" and the tasteful strings underlining Ray Greene's delirious lead vocal on "Love Must Be Patient And Kind" effectively separate the heartfelt from the saccharine.

Tower of Power somehow has managed to freshen the familiar on this, its 25th long-playing disc. And along with the new recording, a pair of archival sets, as well as CD/DVD pairing, are being made available to help mark the band's history, which stretches back to 1968.

—Carlo Wolff

**Soul Side Of Town:** East Bay! All Day!; Hangin' With My Baby; Do You Like That?; On The Soul Side Of Town; Do It With Soul; Love Must Be Patient And Kind; Butter Fried; Selah; Let It Go; Stop; When Love Takes Control; After Hours; Can't Stop Thinking About You; East Bay! Oakland Style! (59:11)

**Personnel:** Adolfo Acosta, trumpet, flugelhorn; Emilio Castillo, tenor saxophone, vocals; Jerry Cortez, guitar, electric sitar, lap steel, baritone guitar, 12-string guitar; Sal Cracchiolo, trumpet, flugelhorn; David Ganibaldi, drums; Roger Smith, Hammond B-3 organ; Ray Greene, vocals, trombone; Chuck Hansen, bass saxophone; Stephen "Doc" Kupka, baritone saxophone; Tom Politzer, tenor, alto, baritone saxophone, clarinet, flute; Francis Rocco Prestia, bass; Marcus Scott, vocals; Joe Vannelli, keyboards.

**Ordering info:** [mackavenue.com](http://mackavenue.com)

## Nicola Conte & Spiritual Galaxy Let Your Light Shine On

MPS 01666

★★★★½

This is Afro-soul filtered through an Italian DJ/guitarist in a South African studio with a lot of American and Swedish instrumentalists.

This worldly music, made by a worldly crew and meant to groove without interruption, draws most of its substance from the propulsion and repetition of Africa's pop diaspora dating to the 1970s—but with a digital polish. Nicola Conte guides his ensemble—a seamless force of horns and percussion—through a succession of churning tracks. On "Ogun," alto saxophonist Logan Richardson jolts and jabs over serenely rolling cymbals and lush piano chords; the nouveau disco of "Cosmic Peace" provides ample space for trombonist Gianluca Petrella to get a spirited spotlight that could've straightened the ruffles on his bandmates' tuxedo shirts. Performances on *Let Your Light Shine On* are immaculate, but what's the message? Song titles often are generic platitudes, lifted straight from the hippie dictionary. And while the album never loses its groove, it's difficult to know if it's actually a success. —Sean J. O'Connell



## Okkyung Lee Cheol-Kkot-Sae (Steel Flower.Bird)

TZADIK 4023

★★★★★

In cellist Okkyung Lee's essay that accompanies her new disc, she notes that the traditional Korean music she'd never studied growing up in her homeland began taking hold of her while she was studying in the U.S.

Over time, Lee began exploring her identity, asking herself if the traditional Korean melodies she found herself singing a world away from home were simply part of her DNA. That investigation reaches an apotheosis here, a collision of Korean music and free improvisation.

It's fitting that the work opens with subtle interactions among vocalist Song-Hee Kwon, percussionist Jae-Hyo Chang and Lee, as if summoning Korean tradition. The singer draws upon the phrasing and intonation of pansori—a storytelling form—but Lee wrote the Korean lyrics, and the musicians quickly move outside of tradition, with extended techniques and sophisticated, spontaneous interplay. The work never feels like an exercise in multiculturalism. It does, though, suggest an underlying quality present in so much of Lee's work during the past 15 years, as if her past is a key to unlock part of her multifaceted, ever-evolving makeup. —Peter Margasak



**Let Your Light Shine On:** Uhuru Na Umoya; Ogun; Cosmic Peace; Universal Rhythm; Mystic Revelation Of The Gods; Let Your Light Shine On; Space Dimensions; Tribes From The Unknown; Me Do Wo; Essence Of The Sun; Love Power; Afro Black. (62:48)

**Personnel:** Nicola Conte, guitar; Zara McFarlane (2), Zoe Modica (6, 10), Bridgette Amofah (1, 3, 4, 9, 11, 12), Carolina Bubbico (1, 3, 7, 12), vocals; Gianluca Petrella, trombone, Minimoog; Luca Alemanno, bass; Logan Richardson, alto saxophone; Magnus Lindgren, tenor saxophone, flute; Theo Croker, trumpet; Pietro Lussu, piano, organ, Fender Rhodes; Teppo Mäkynen, drums, percussion; Tommaso Capellato, drums (5); Abdissa Assefa, percussion.

**Ordering info:** [mps-music.com](http://mps-music.com)

**Cheol-Kkot-Sae (Steel Flower.Bird):** CheolKkot-Sae (Steel Flower.Bird); Ahp-Ghil-Eh-Neun (On The Road In Front Of.); Jeh-Bi (Swallows); Neup (Swamp); Norae Hanah (Just A Song); Pyun-Ji (Letters); Geu-Ri-Go-Nah-Sun (Then.); Gheo-Wool (Mirrors). (44:31)

**Personnel:** Okkyung Lee, cello; Song-Hee Kwon, pansori singing; Jae-Hyo Chang, Korean traditional percussion; John Butcher, tenor, soprano saxophone; John Edwards, bass; Ches Smith, drums, percussion, vibraphone; Lasse Marhaug, electronics.

**Ordering info:** [tzadik.com](http://tzadik.com)