SAN FRANCISCO BAY
GUARDIAN
JUNE 30, 1993 • VOL. 27, NO. 39 THE BAY AREA'S BEST EVERY WEEK

GROOVES

TRANCE MISSION • *TRANCE MISSION* (CITY OF TRIBES)

During the 1980s, great hopes were invested in the double mind/body whammy of early world beat. The Byrne-Eno and Talking Heads experiments, the Bay Area's loose coalition of Big City, Freaky Executives, and the Looters, and the peaking popularity of reggae and African pop were all cited as examples of music with both cerebral and visceral appeal, stimulating both the brain and the booty. Trance Mission, the Bay Area quartet that draws its membership from Lights in a Fat City, Club Foot Orchestra, and Blue Rubies, resolves that old Cartesian dichotomy on an even more cosmic plane. This is a recording you can dance to, bliss out with, or use as a mind-expanding background against which to ponder your life's great problems.

Trance Mission features many of the same instruments used by Lights in a Fat City: the didgeridoo (the droning sacred aboriginal instrument made from eucalyptus branches) played by British-born world traveler Stephen Kent; the Indonesian and Asian reeds and percussion (plus the sampling and processing skills) of "microchip and windmeister" Ken Newby; and Blue Rubies percussionist John Loose's storehouse of tablas and drums. The first great departure is provided by the unpredictable clarinetist virtuoso and composer Beth Custer, who springs a variety of ethnic and remotely jazz-derived melodies from the textures and rhythms. Another is the result of the graceful and seamless application of electronics to create a kind of post–New Age spaciness. So while there is much in common here with various trance musics of the world, there is a kinship with mesmerizing and beat-conscious '90s dance music.

The players hail from England, Canada, New Hampshire, and New York, by way of Uganda, Java, the Australian outback, and Carnegie Hall, and the music alternately bristles and glides through an improvisationally based amalgam of aboriginal drones, polyrhythmic percussion, chantlike vocals, and the looping acrobatics of clarinets, toy horns, and Balinese flutes. Several tracks lock into irresistible dance grooves that could fuel your next rave. *Trance Mission*, meticulously engineered by Oliver DiCicco at San Francisco's Mobius Music, thus has an even more global reach than most world beat and contemporary club music — its geographic center is somewhere between the universal solar plexus and the collective unconscious.

The natural affinity between Trance Mission's extrapolation of international traditions and the ecstasies of techno will be underscored shortly when City of Tribes (the ethnic ambient-music flip side of house and techno music label Zoe Magik) releases a 12-inch dance disc featuring Trance Mission performing two songs by Young American Primitive, backed with YAP's techno versions of two cuts from this CD. And when Trance Mission completes its own full-length "techno-wave psychedelic" video.

***Trance Mission** performs Wed/30, at the Great American Music Hall, SF.*

Mark Richardson