

Mp3 Cameron Morgan - The Ambition Tax



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Debut album performed in an original style that mixes pop and modern rock with jazz flavors. Lyrically personal, soulful vocals and a tonal range from delicate acoustic finger-picking to electric guitar blow-outs. Think Nick Drake meets Jeff Buckley. 12 MP3 Songs ROCK: Modern Rock, FOLK: Political

Details: "This is a record I felt compelled to make," says multi-instrumentalist singer-songwriter Cameron Morgan. "After spending the first eight years of my professional life supporting other people's musical visions, I wanted my first album to raise awareness and ask questions about this government of ours that's in power." Issued July 4, 2005 on the Zashabuti Records label, The Ambition Tax -- the title alludes to the inescapable levy imposed on the common man today -- was entirely written and produced by Morgan, who describes the 12-song effort as "a summation of many of my musical experiences to date." Those began at an early age, as his parents owned a pair of record stores, Evolution Records Tapes, in Houston and Galveston, Texas. Morgan started playing bass clarinet and piano at age 10, branching out to guitar, bass, drums, and vocals a year later. By age 15, he was awarded third place in a contest to determine Houston's best guitarist. While still in high school, Morgan alternated between working in his family's and uncle's record stores and leading Remindless, a psychedelic space-rock trio that performed throughout Texas for three years and recorded a seven-song EP, Oceans Of Sonacy, for the band's own Khaos Records. "Eventually," says Morgan, "I found myself wanting to merge the feel and power of rock with the harmonic improvisational qualities of jazz." After winning All-American honors as Best Jazz Guitarist at an International Association for Jazz Education (IAJE) convention -- where he backed and jammed with such luminaries as Betty Carter, Roy Hargrove, Ed Thigpen, and Jon Faddis -- Morgan enrolled at the University of North Texas, where his classmates included Spoon bassist Joshua Zarbo and Norah Jones. Upon graduating from UNT with a degree in jazz performance in 1997, Morgan lent his

talents to a variety of jazz, Western swing, blues, rockabilly, and horn-driven funk outfits, while playing everything from solo acoustic shows to chitlin circuit gigs with veteran soulster Al "T.N.T." Braggs to a series of dates with Barnum's Kaleidoscope Circus. Morgan relocated to New York City in 1999, moving to Los Angeles a year later, where his experiences included performing in the stage band for the long-running play "Tony And Tina's Wedding" at the Henry Fonda Theatre, jet-setting with top Persian artists Dariush and Ebi, and substitute teaching at the Silver Lake Conservatory of Music (founded by Red Hot Chili Peppers bassist Flea). He also performed with KCRW favorite Jesca Hoop, jazzman Bennie Maupin, added licks to Deepsky remixes, and played with ex-Knack drummer Bruce Gary and still-Knack bassist Prescott Niles as well as former Jane's Addiction drummer Stephen Perkins and erstwhile Jimmy Page/Blue Murder bassist Tony Franklin. "I always thought that if I could just play music without having to take a day job, I could consider myself a successful musician," explains Morgan, whose most recent performances have been with L.A. free-form improvisatory collective Mojo Triage and the similarly minded Mass Ensemble -- the latter creates their own instruments and plays all over the world, including the 2005 Lollapalooza and Coachella festivals. Morgan also wrote, produced, and played on the latest Mass Ensemble album (Golden Sun) as well as wrote and added guitar and vocals to Dave Tough's most recent LP (Gravity Always Wins). All of which brings us to The Ambition Tax ... Working with bassist Ian Walker (The Ditty Bops, Paula Cole) and drummer Greg Inverso, Morgan recorded the basic tracks live -- with Neil Citron engineering -- over a two-day period at guitar hero Steve Vai's Mothership Studios in Los Angeles. (Another day's worth of vocals, a half-day's worth of acoustic guitar, some overdubbing at Morgan's home studio, and that's it.) "It's a concept album -- but it's not like there's a story with continuing characters," Morgan elaborates. "I wanted to create an overview of what it's like to live in this particular moment in time when baby boomers have abandoned their ideals and Generation Xers are up to their asses in debt and why having a family doesn't seem like such a good idea anymore." A spiritual message sung in a plaintive tenor, "Zither" sets the tone of the album, which ranges from delicate acoustic finger-picking to storming, effects-laden, electric guitar blow-outs. Beyond playing all the guitars and keyboards heard on the record, Morgan proves himself a supple, earnest vocalist -- evocative of a less melodramatic Jeff Buckley or the younger Sting -- wrapping righteous socio-political convictions in Rundgrenesque Anglo-pop confections such as "Wake Up Freedom," "Falling Down," and "Blood Red." The industrial-strength "Bottom Line" and the shuffling "I Get Around" are both tied into the album's titular

concerns. "In 'Bottom Line,' the music business is just a metaphor," says Morgan. "Our whole society is built on the idea that if you work real hard, you might get a break. But then you realize that it's not how hard you try, it's about how much you can sell yourself." The jazzy, minor-key "Pollution Blues" addresses burning ecological issues with a blazing guitar fade that parallels and echoes the fiery images and fretgrinding exit found in "Falling Down." A gently percussive "Nov 26, 2004" serves as a peaceful refuge from the album's opening salvo. "That song is designed to be a palate-cleanser," explains Morgan, "as if it were the last cut on the first side of the album, which -- in the case of the vinyl version of The Ambition Tax -- it is." Underscoring the album's release date, the flamenco-flavored "4th Of July" is -- in Morgan's words -- "meant to be celebratory, but narcissism keeps creeping into the picture, leading to the single-mindedness that plagues this country," as evidenced in the National Anthem-quoting vocal refrain that erupts out of the parade drumming-driven "Amerika." The album's closing tracks, the inexorably building "Close" and the pop standard-inspired "In The Heart," are love songs that yearn for a simpler life that remains tantalizingly out of reach ... for now. "I could've easily made a record that sounds like everything else that's on the radio," says Morgan. "But I wanted to incorporate all these different musical elements into songs that said something about life in 2005 and build from there. This album is just the foundation for the future." For further information, go to cameronmorgan.com

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