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Melvin Jackson *Funky Skull* DUSTY GROOVE CD

The peerless e-tailer Dusty Groove (and mighty fine bricks and mortar store too) ventures into reissue territory with a series of lovingly restored discs representing the fringes of the crate-digger canon. Long treasured among collectors of outré funk records, *Funky Skull* is a meeting of the minds of the various factions of Chicago's late 60s music scene: a cosmic, on-the-one jam session between the AACM (Lester Bowie, Roscoe Mitchell and Wadada Leo Smith), the Chess/Cadet cadre (Phil Upchurch, Jodie Christian and Morris Jennings) and free radicals like Pete Cosey and Billy Hart. Melvin Jackson was Eddie Harris's bass player and, like his mentor, he hooks his bass up to all manner of flangers, filters and Echoplexes, creating an effect at times comic stoopid (the quacking bassline of "Cold Duck Time") and at others deep-space drift ("Say What", "Dance Of The Dervish"). While Jackson is very much the star of the show, the stellar cast of side players definitely make their presence felt: "Bold & Black" sounds very much like Art Ensemble Of Chicago's "Theme De Yoyo", while drummer Morris Jennings gets seriously busy on the title track. The only disappointment on *Funky Skull* is that Cosey is not given free rein.

PETER SHAPIRO

Jorge Ben *Força Bruta* DUSTY GROOVE CD

Perhaps too dainty for some, too conservative for others, with still more griping that it doesn't have enough of the wild pan-genre promiscuity that characterised Tropicália, 1970's *Força Bruta* is nevertheless a stone cold classic of Brazilian modernism. Firmly grounded in samba (with backing from the great Trio Mocotó) but with tips of the hat to bossa nova and subtle touches of funk and soul, *Força Bruta* is emblematic of Brazil's seemingly national gift for weaving beguiling syncretic music from practically any cloth. Of special note in this regard are the uncredited string arrangements that swirl entrancingly around Fritz Escovão's cuíca on tracks like "Mulher Brasileira" and swoon languidly to provide counterpoint on more rhythmically upbeat tracks like "Charles Jr" and "Pulo, Pulo". The latter track also features nifty Sergio Mendes-style horn riffs, which become Stax-ified on "O Telefone Tocou Novamente". But it is the title track, a charming reworking of the eternal "Tighten

Up" groove, that has given this generally dreamy album such cachet among the crate diggers and soul aficionados. Ben himself also lends some grit to the proceedings by adding some rasp to his usual nasal languor, creating something of a minor masterpiece of textural contrast. PETER SHAPIRO