

## VOICES OF EAST HARLEM: Right On Be Free (Label: Rhino)

Written by Bill Buckley

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The Voices of East Harlem were a New York community choir who were to the late 60s/early 70s what the Sounds Of Blackness were to the 90s. That's to say they emerged from their community/church roots to enjoy a measure of commercial success without compromising their integrity, sound or beliefs. In reality the Voices never enjoyed the huge success of the Sounds, but their 1970 debut set 'Right On Be Free' caused major ripples and you can hear exactly why on this new Rhino reissue that adds 11 bonus cuts to the original 10 track album. That original set was an energy-charged, passionate selection of thoughtful cover versions and what, back in the day, were called protest songs. The vocals (mainly down to Gerri Griffin and Cynthia Sessions) are fluid and there's a real live, committed feel to proceedings. It's the same with the bonus cuts, which include the single, 'Oxford Town' (produced by Donny Hathaway) and previously unreleased album tracks of which 'Nation Time' was written by an emerging Gamble and Huff. In fairness the music here is very much of its time and maybe hard to connect with in places where you can't contextualise. However, as a valuable piece of black music heritage, the set is vital. It's part of Rhino's big re-issue programme that also sees classic albums from people like Leroy Hutson, Ace Spectrum, Prince Phillip Mitchell, Ronn Matlock, Gwen McCrae and Blue Magic deservedly back on the racks.

(BB) 4/5