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ANANDA PROJECT; Fire Flower (Nite Grooves/King Street Sounds)

It's hard to believe that it's been almost four years since Ananda Project's last full album, the uplifting 'Morning Light'. The Project's core – Chris Brann, Terrance Downs, Heather Johnson and Julius Speed are here joined by Lydia Rhodes, Gaelle Addison, Sylvia Gordon, Marta Gazman and, most tellingly, Chicago actress/singer Denise White who's incredible vocal range call to the mind the ethereal beauty of Minnie Ripperton. Indeed it's Denise who leads on of the LP's key tracks – 'Free Me'. It's a big jazzy, samba school epic that will call to mind the great productions that Charles Stepney crafted with Rotary Connection. Elsewhere there's solid soulful house, chilly interludes, enigmatic instrumentals and a couple of potential huge floor fillers in 'Where The Music Takes Me' and 'Universal Love'. The former marries jazzy changes to soulful rhythms and oldies (like me) will smile fondly and remember the Mizells and the Blackbyrds; the latter is almost poppy in it its catchiness – and it will worm its way into your psyche in the way that the old Naked tunes did. Indeed that's the benchmark I'd use to describe 'Fire Flower' – super, soulful house à la Naked. Out August 6th.

(RATING 5) (B.B)