

**VAN MORRISON, GEORGIE FAME, MOSE ALLISON, BEN SIDRAN:**

Tell Me Something: The Songs Of Mose Allison (Verve)

Rating: \*\*\*\*1/2

By Jon Young

What a delight! Unlike most tribute albums, which devalue the artist's work in the name of saluting it, this celebration of Mose Allison does the man justice with irresistible flair. It's no surprise, of course, since all three principals--Van Morrison, Georgie Fame and Ben Sidran--are veteran Allison scholars, not to mention fine musicians themselves. Nor does it hurt that Mose himself performs on two tracks, although his triumphant appearance late in the program neither upstages his admirers nor breaks the mood. *Tell Me Something* deftly captures the essence of the man's hipster-philosopher persona, dispensing liberating, bluesy grooves and sobering food for thought along the way.

Allison's savvy blend of opposites--lip facade plus yearning soul--makes a potent brew. With Sidran providing a nifty approximation of Allison's easy-rolling piano licks, supported by Fame's tasty Hammond organ, the three amigos take turns delivering wry observations on mortality and fallibility. (Though Morrison is the most charismatic and technically gifted singer, he sounds slightly heavy-handed compared to Sidran and Fame's more Mose-like inflections.) Van sets the mood on the opening track with the funky "One Of These Days," a reprobate's reflections on the perils of the high life, a theme revisited in Fame's breezy "Back On The Corner." If the half-hearted pledges to get straight fail to convince, the intimations of impending doom ring utterly true, especially in two tracks sung by Sidran. From the sly aside that "your time will come" in "If You Live" to "Look Here," which bluntly states, "It's jus' dyin' that bothers me," Allison's songs don't deny the abyss.

Happily, the elegant lightness of the music provides an uplifting antidote, suggesting hope in the face of oblivion. Searching for salvation, Fame alludes to "moments of unspoken bliss" in "Was," while Allison himself savors fleeting interludes of transcendence in the dreamy "Perfect Moment." As with other great art, the songs of Mose Allison provide both a strong dose of hard truths and a reason to go on trying in spite of reality. Exhilarating and unsettling at once, like Allison's own recordings, *Tell Me Something* says plenty.