

The Jazz Journal

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

Vol. III: April 2010

Greetings !

Welcome to the third issue of "The Jazz Journal". Hopefully, you're finding the reviews helpful to you as you explore adding more Jazz titles to your collections.

This month, I'll take a look at two Saxophonists; one old, and one not so old. Art Pepper (deceased) and Joshua Redman (the "not so old") each have discs reviewed here. Art Pepper's "Meet the Rhythm Section" is a classic every serious Jazz collector should own. It is now also available on an even newer 24Bit Re-Mastered edition just released in late March. Redman's "Back East" wins Selection of the Month for March. It takes top honors by offering both outstanding music and a well-engineered recording. Redman also has one newer release available that we'll review in an upcoming issue of Jazz Journal.

I also reviewed the latest release from Pat Metheny titled "Orchestrion". This disc is the result of some marvelous techno-gadgetry created by Metheny. Much of the intrigue about this disc is centered on the process Metheny used to create the music. Take a visit to Metheny's website <http://patmetheny.com/orchestrioninfo/>, or just buy the disc to read the full story on this very interesting process. Metheny's site even has a video showing off his gadgets and the process.

Lastly, an eclectic blend of two Jazz styles is reviewed on The Manhattan Transfer's "Chick Corea Songbook". This disc offers music that I found to be at both ends of the enjoyment spectrum; either **Very Good** or **Not Very Good**. Not much in the middle. The vocal group, known for its clean and glorious harmonies is blended with new arrangements of works by one of Jazz fusions' legendary performers; Chick Corea. This mash results in an overall satisfying work, with a few blemishes that prevent it from being outstanding.

Next month, we'll try to get in a review of the new John McLaughlin and Chick Corea disc, "Five Peace Band". It warranted being highlighted this month but time and web-site capacity limits forced a choice; music BY Chick Corea, or music HONORING Chick Corea. I went with the honoring tilt.

One of the neat things about Jazz is that there are a lot of resources for you to get information about recordings and artists. There are three mainstream magazines devoted entirely to the Jazz idiom;

JAZZIZ,

<http://www.jazziz.com/>

Jazz Times

<http://jazztimes.com/> and,

Down Beat.

<http://www.downbeat.com/>

Most are typically available in the big chain book stores, online, or via subscription at a discounted price. My personal online favorite is Down Beat Digital Edition. I'll let you in on a little secret...you can view ALL Down Beat issues online for free! It's a little tricky to get to, but the current and past issues are all posted for you to read online. I'm not sure if the magazine will maintain the free access indefinitely, but it's free right now...so check it out! One of the online versions also has active links on the pages that allow you to listen to samples of the artist being discussed in the articles AND even in the advertisements.

Check out DownBeat Digital here:

<http://www.downbeat.com/digitaledition/2010/archive.html>

Another great source of Jazz music information is National Public Radio (NPR) online.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10002>

Once you're on the NPR site, click on "register" on the home page. You can sign up for free updates about all sorts of Jazz, Classical, and other genres of music sent directly to your email. NPR has a great offering of online concert downloads and performances that are absolutely free as well. NPR posted a short story on the NPR Blog about the free *Down Beat Digital* version as well.

http://www.npr.org/blogs/ablogsupreme/2010/02/wait_downbeat_h_as_a_digital_edition.html

Jazz Times does also have a section devoted to Audio Systems, often featuring Audiophile level products.

<http://jazztimes.com/sections/home-audio/articles>

There are Jazz fan groups on Facebook and LinkedIn, including a local Atlanta group, although most events are on the far Southern end of the city. Additionally there are several venues around the city that offer a fair number of opportunities to view some good Jazz up close and personally. Be sure to plan to attend the **Atlanta Jazz Festival May 29 and 30th at Piedmont Park**. For Details: <http://atlantafestivals.com/>

There is another interesting blog I've recently discovered called "Between the Grooves" that offers pretty good coverage of all kinds of Jazz information including links to publications, concert dates, Jazz Festival information, and articles on artists and their music.

<http://betweenthegrooves.wordpress.com/about/>

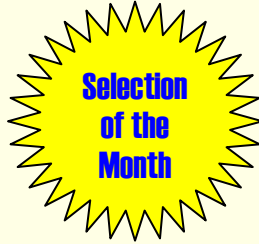
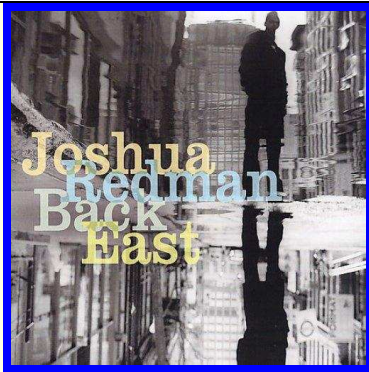
Lastly, don't forget, <http://www.jazzradio.com/>. While there is not extensive information on the site about the artists, you can hear good quality streaming music and explore various styles of jazz for free online and subscribe to a newsletter.

Until Next Time!!



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Joshua Redman: *Back East*

Joshua Redman: Producer

Nonesuch (Warner Brothers) Records. Released: April, 2007

Audio Quality/Music: 4.0/4.5

Genre: Mainstream Jazz

Back East is an outstanding work from tenor Saxophonist, Joshua Redman. He has a 2009 release but it is the previous disc we're reviewing here. If you're not familiar with him, you should be! Joshua is the son of famous, legendary tenor Sax player Dewey Redman who died many years ago. Dewey was a great player and the musical gene was absolutely passed down to the next generation. *Back East* provides a great body of work that pays homage to many of the great Sax players of the past including John Coltrane and his own father. It does however include several of his own compositions that may too one day be covered by future Saxophonists.

Redman is joined by a great entourage in a Sax, Drum, Bass trio with various configurations. Bass is handled by Reuben Rogers or Larry Grenadier, with a special appearance by Christian McBride. Redman of course contributes on tenor Sax, but Joe Lovano on tenor, and Dewey Redman on both alto and tenor, with Chris Cheek on Soprano each makes appearances as well. Ali Jackson, Brian Blade, and Eric Harland take turns covering the drum parts.

The recording is very nicely done, with the drum parts particularly airy and crisp. The trio mix offers exquisite access into each of the roles without getting lost in too much sound engineering and electronic manipulation. The instruments are very clear and distinct throughout. The cymbals in particular are especially well-mic'd, offering a "live" and very full dimensional quality to the recording.

Now on to the show!

Track One is a remake of a timeless Rodgers and Hammerstein classic; "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top". It begins with Redman playing the chorus and the rest of the trio quickly joins. Man does this tune start to swing about 1:30 into the track. It also allows each player to showcase a bit throughout, but Redman sets the stage with his super-smooth style.

Next up (track 2) is "East of the Sun (and West of the Moon)". This track has Redman cruising over a nice up-beat tempo and some great percussion by Ali Jackson.

"Zarafah" (track 3) gets kicked off and immediately you're taken on a trip to Asia-India and you're enjoying every minute it. This is a beautiful, simple piece featuring Redman layering his fluid playing over nice percussion elements and a cruising Bass line and a feature by Christian McBride.

Track 4, "Indian Song" is a Wayne Shorter (of Weather Report) composition and features Joe Lovano and Redman together in a dual Saxophone configuration that has one mic'd completely on the right (Lovano), and Redman completely on the left. This is an audio delight. They're both standing in your listening space taking turns and collaborating. The drums and bass are evenly balanced in the mix.

"I'm an Old Cowhand" (#5) features Redman cruising along with the trio, offering though absolutely fabulous solos throughout.

"Wagon Wheels" (#6) starts with a wonderful Reuben Rogers bass solo that makes you think you should be watching a classic Clint Eastwood western. The tune evolves into a simple and elegant little groove, again featuring the velvety-smooth Redman on Soprano.

"Back East" is the title track at number 7. Redman makes his runs seem totally effortless on this track despite the complexity of the composition. Around the 3:50 mark of this track, you are really swinging and Redman is getting heated up...this is good music! At 5:00 Eric Harland gets a drum solo for emphasis.

"Mantra #5" follows and is a delightful blend of Redman and Cheek, both on Soprano; back and forth, left and right, then together on the soundstage, then left and right again. The lovely sax tones overlay a simple snare drum and bass groove in back...wonderful music nicely recorded!

"Indonesia" is track 9, and offers a neat blend of Sax, Bass, and mostly tambourine for percussion. Redman's sax continues it's silky journey and the tambourine is recorded and presented crisply and clear with no 'slushiness'.

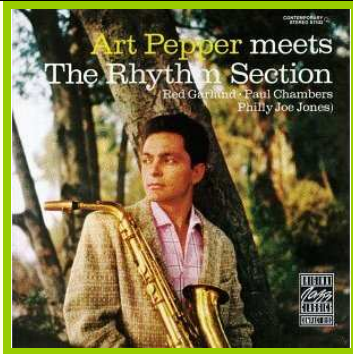
John Coltrane's "India" is next (#10)...and this is of course phenomenal!! Joshua and Dewey Redman are on either side of the room playing tenors back and forth before the tune takes off. Awesome! Once the tune gets cranking, the Redmans alternate virtuoso "tenoring" over a hot, driving beat.

The final track is "GJ". This is a soul-moving piece that starts with Redman soloing with Larry Grenadier on Bass. The track moves to close out the disc with a touch of freeform, "Avant Garde" feel and then ends rather abruptly with a quick fade out...a somewhat different approach.

This is a fine disc you'll want in your collection... Great music, well-recorded. What else is there?

Audio Samples available at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000N4S95Q/ref=s9_si_mh_qw_p15_i1?pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_s=cent_er2&pf_rd_r=0K7AKHGWHKJP0MN2PFB6&pf_rd_t=101&pf_rd_p=470938631&pf_rd_i=507846



Art Pepper: *Meets The Rhythm Section*

Producer: Lester Koenig

Contemporary Records: Released 2002 (Original 1957)

Audio Quality/Music: 4.0/4.0 (20bit K2 Remastered)

Genre: Mainstream Jazz

Art Pepper is the quintessential Jazz Sax player, and *Art Pepper Meets the Rhythm Section* is the quintessential Jazz quartet in its' finest form. 1957?!?! Yes, that what it says, 1957! This work was initially released then, and has now been reissued in a wonderful way using new re-mastering technology. The version I'm reviewing here is the 2000 release on Contemporary Records and used the 20bit K2 Re-mastering process. An even newer version is being release March 30, 2010 and will use 24 Bit re-mastering technology on the Original Jazz Classics label.

This disc is extremely well-recorded and mastered and you will enjoy it both musically and because of it's engineering. Shigeo Miyamoto and Tamaki Back of JVC Studios are responsible for this wonderful piece of work. Most of the disc features the quartet isolated on the right channel and Pepper's sax isolated on the left. This mix evokes an extremely "lush" feeling to the music and Pepper's Alto sax is so crisp and warm, you'll swear he's standing right there...it's that good!

As for the music, it is absolutely fantastic. It features Art Pepper on his sweet Alto Sax, accompanied by Red Garland on piano, Paul Chambers on upright Bass, and Philly Joe Jones on Drums. The story about this session is that it was done on the fly as the quartet had not played with Pepper prior to the actual recording session. The 'trio' accompanying Pepper had though previously toured together with Miles Davis so they were familiar with each other, but not at all with Pepper. Supposedly Pepper, who had a well-documented drug problem, hadn't played his instrument for weeks prior, and the horn itself was in disrepair. Pepper himself, later described the session as 'magical' as he felt the musicians somehow found a synergy he had not experienced before. Whether the 'magic' was real or drug-influenced is immaterial when you listen to this disc as the result is a legendary work that is so well-done, you have to wonder if 'magic' didn't really occur in the studio that day. This recording helped establish Pepper as a certifiable "Jazz Master" and began a string of successful releases over the next several years...albeit years interrupted by occasional jail time! Pepper released over 60 LP's from 1957 through about 1982 as a band leader and another dozen or so as a sideman.

That's actually quite impressive for someone with Pepper's 'distractions'!

The disc gets going with the famous Cole Porter tune, "You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To". This classic sets the stage for the rest of the album. Pepper is mostly on the left, and the mix is evenly distributed on this track to both channels and is excellently mixed. It's of course a very snappy tune featuring Pepper's casual, yet refined manners. Philly Joe Jones playing on the drums is a demonstration of finesse, and precision, and Paul Chambers' Bass is so subtle but ever present, it just pushes the tune along behind Pepper but never overpowers. Fantastic stuff!

Track 2 is "Red Pepper Blues". Oh yeah! This is swinging be bop, bluesy stuff. Pepper cruises over a hippy dippy blues beat. Nice solos by Red Garland are featured along with Chamber's bowing his big Bass also.

"Imagination"(J. Van Heusen) is next and a lovely ballad it is. Recorded early by Glen Miller among many, this is a classic performance that does the song complete justice.

"Waltz Me Blues" is next and continues Peppers fluid playing over the swinging bass line.

"Straight Life" (track 5) gives the quartet a chance to pick up the pace. You hear every note Pepper plays distinctly, despite the blistering pace of the piece. Toe-tapping good.

"Jazz Me Blues" is a New Orleans Jazz standard. Pepper smoothes the tune out a bit with this arrangement, but keeps just a hint of the New Orleans vibe in it.

"Tin Tin Deo" is track 7. This is a real cool and grooving tune that could be classic spy movie soundtrack from the 1960's. Pepper gets his chops flowing about midway. If you're at all familiar with a contemporary Jazz saxophonist, David Sanborn, you'll hear how Pepper must have influence him with this sound. You'll get another Philly Joe Jones drum solo for a treat again on this one.

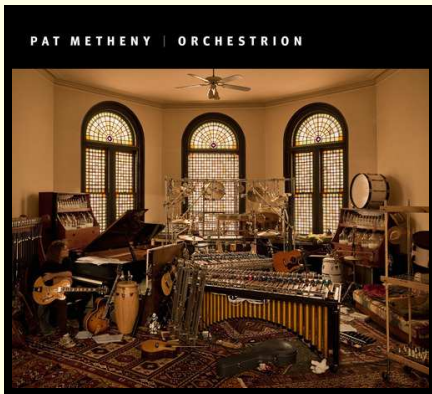
"Star Eyes" is another classic track, with a nice swing and an assortment of solos. "Birks Works" rounds out the original version of the disc. It is a classic track that you'll find yourself humming the rest of the day.

"The Man I Love" is a bonus track added to the re-mastered disc. Things get swinging right away and Pepper is silky smooth as ever, on top of the snappy tempo.

This disc is a gem well-worth being in every Jazz aficionado's collection. It showcases a phenomenal musician, who's life cut short at age 56, could have done even more with fewer obstacles in his life. The 24 bit version should be on shelves now.

Audio Samples available at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Meets-Rhythm-Section-Bit-Mastering/dp/B00004UEN8/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1269995553&sr=1-1



Pat Metheny: *Orchestrion*

Producer: Pat Metheny

Nonesuch (Warner Brothers) Records: Released, Jan. 26, 2010

Audio Quality/Music: 3.5/3.5

Genre: Contemporary Jazz

“ORCHESTRION”, not “ORCHESTRATION”! I had inadvertently been referring to Pat Metheny’s new disc as being entitled “OrcheSTRATION”...same number of syllables and it looks like OrcheSTRATION as first glance! Well “Orchestrion” is an entirely different word altogether.

In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, inventors and musicians created musical devices that could play multiple instruments at once. The technology also allowed a musician to have his music replicated to be played repeatedly. The contraptions were called “Orchestrions”. You can visualize the old fashioned player pianos or the simple little wind up music boxes with the little wheel with spikes on it that would pluck a series of little metal teeth in an order that would create a simple little lul-la-bye or love song. The Orchestrion would take the concept a bit further by attaching other instruments like a simple drum or cymbal or tambourine, and later more complex configurations of instruments.

Here, Metheny borrows this concept from the past and applies it to his own, modern-day, ultra high-tech orchestrion. Metheny took several years to commission dozens of musical and mechanical tinkerers to create the various mechanisms for him to use on this recording. There are actuators that are attached to instruments to strike the guitar strings, play the drums, marimbas, cymbals, piano, and a host of other ‘homebrewed’ percussion instruments, just as if a natural person would. Metheny of course remains true to his distinctive guitar playing, in the stereotypical “Metheny” style.

He plays his guitar, soloing as he does consistently, on each track. The most amazing thing about this disc and its music is that this is truly a solo performance. Metheny plays his entire collection of instruments SIMULTANEOUSLY! It is not a solo recording in the typical format, where the musician plays each instrument individually, then mixes the tracks into a single arrangement.

Metheny wanted something more dramatic and more “authentic”. This technique was something Metheny had designed and conceptualized for many, many years. Through a complex system of computer controlled and motion activated sensors, Metheny is able to ‘play’ all the instruments by what he plays on his guitar, and by an elaborate remote-controlled system.

While the music itself does not break any new ground, the method by which it is produced is revolutionary. The title track, “Orchestrion” begins with the marimbas cruising along with layers of percussion instruments being added little by little, and finally Metheny’s guitar as well. It has a nice driving little beat with lots of synthesized components. This tune establishes what the rest of the disc will be like: more of the same.

“Entry Point” (track 2) is a very serene track that begins with Metheny’s guitar, a small bit of percussion, and piano. It’s a lovely ballad that’s very relaxing to listen to.

“Expansion” (track 3) is the most up-tempo and has the most depth of arrangement of the disc. Metheny incorporates lots of unique syncopations and time changes in the track to keep things more interesting.

Track four is “Soul Search”. This is another ballad that offers more beautiful playing by Metheny and more of the orchestrion automated performance. Around 4:20, the piece shifts gears into a bit of a swing for a nice departure from the previous mode.

The final track is “Spirit of The Air”. This track is the epitome of the Metheny sound. If you own any of his works previously, this will be a very familiar sound. (“Falcon and the Snowmen”, or “As Fall Wichita, So Falls Witchita Falls”).

I did enjoy the disc, but the music did have a slight ‘sterile’ quality to it. The robotic playing of the instruments just didn’t quite measure up to the naturalness and nuances offered by ‘us humans’. The technological accomplishment here though MUST be commended. It is quite a marvel for that reason primarily.

Audio Samples available at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Orchestrion-Pat-Metheny/dp/B002U33GTW/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1270080708&sr=8-1



The Manhattan Transfer: *The Chick Corea Songbook*

Producers: The Manhattan Transfer

Four Quarters Entertainment: Released: Sept. 29, 2009

Audio Quality/Music: 3.5/3.5

Genre: Contemporary Vocal Jazz

I know...a vocal group singing Chick Corea tunes! What kind of absurdity is this?!?! Well let me tell you, it isn't absurd, it's actually very, very, good and well executed. If you are a Manhattan Transfer fan, you'll like this. If you're a Chick Corea fan, you'll like this, because you've heard these tunes before, just in a very different way.

The Manhattan Transfer (TMT) consisting of Cheryl Bentyne, Tim Hauser, Alan Paul, and Janis Siegal celebrated their 40th anniversary together with this disc. TMT has never sounded better in my opinion. I may have a bit of bias to the material as Corea is a personal favorite, but all biases aside, this music is very good.

Some of the arrangements are in actuality "vocalease", that is; lyrics have been created for a song that was in its original form, an instrumental tune. This makes for some outstanding vocal harmonies and lyrics that allow TMT to fully exploit their chops without concern for honoring an original vocalist. However, even on the tracks that originally had vocal performances ("Spain", "500 Miles High"), TMT stretches the boundaries, yet keeps the flavor of the original composition in tact and honored.

Many of the musicians on this disc are also authentic contributors to some of the original works. Performing on a variety of tracks on this disc are: Chick Corea, piano/keyboards; Airto, percussion; Alex Acuna, percussion, Christian McBride, Bass; and Fred Hersch, piano. The disc is loaded with a host of other talented musicians as well. A list a bit too long to list in its entirety here.

The music is fantastic. "Free Samba" is track one, and begins with a tropical sound effect and a tribal-like vocal harmony layered on top. Then you hear him, IT'S CHICK COREA! His unmistakable Yamaha keyboard kicks in. Chick plays a great solo, while TMT hums along...in perfect complimentary harmonies. Beautiful! The track moves back and forth from light and airy to almost full-on fusion. This is a great first track.

"Spain, (I Can Recall) Prelude" is next. This is a nice prelude sung in Spanish accompanied by Ramon Stagnero on Spanish Guitar. The vocal harmonies are crisp and well-balanced and are presented with a fair amount of depth. "Spain, I Can Recall" immediately follows. This time, "kicked up a notch" from the original with a neat, funky drum and percussion beat.

"One Step Closer" features a Don Shelton whistling solo at the very beginning, and Christian McBride on Bass. "Children's Song #15" is a simple arrangement of vocals, marimba, and various flutes and also makes a nice audio demo song. "500 Miles High" follows and is a personal favorite. I remember first hearing Flora Purim perform it back in the 1980's. It's a beautiful rendition of a classic tune that's been performed by many. The arrangement of this version is a bit cleaner and simplified for an even more relaxed feel. "Another Roadside Attraction" is awesome. This track has a real sinister rhythm going on underneath the very pleasant vocals. This is a great audio demo track with lots of good percussion and vocal blends and effects. "Time's Lie" follows and features a nice swing pulse with Fred Hersch on piano. Hersch also did the vocal arrangements here. A very nice tune this is.

"La Chanson Du Bebe (Children's Song #1)" is another little audio treat. It begins with some nature sounds intermixed with giggling little kids and a piano. TMT vocals create the rest of the instrumentation in a sing-song style. Another great little demo tune that offers some nice vocal harmony and vocal effects. "Ragtime in Pixiland (Pixiland Rag)" is a little carnival-like in rhythm and tone...a little Willie Wonka-ish. But guess what, I still like it!

"The Story of Anna & Armando (Armando's Rhumba)" is a beautiful ballad that features TMT performing acapella in the beginning. Immediately after though, a full-tilt Latin Rumba kicks in and takes us to the last track, "Free Samba" (extended version).

The final track is a reprise of the opening track, this time just a bit longer with some extended percussion at the end.

The 3.5 scores here deserve a bit of an explanation. Regarding Audio Quality, the recording is well-done but a bit "hot" and a tad compressed for a vocalist-featured recording, not quite deserving of a 4 or greater, but still very good. As for the music, the 3.5 mark is only due to the presence of a few ambitious tracks that didn't quite come up to par with the rest. The three tracks "Free Samba", "Spain", and "500 Miles High" by themselves makes the disc worth buying, particularly for TMT fans.

Audio Samples available at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Chick-Corea-Songbook-Manhattan-Transfer/dp/B002IVLWG0/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1270165970&sr=1-3

