

The Jazz Journal

Audio Video Club of Atlanta
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www.avca.org

Welcome back Jazz Fans!

I'm glad to bring you this issue of "Jazz Journal". Now that the weather is beginning to cool off, the music in this issue I promise you is 'hot'!

This time around, we explore a wide variety of jazz styles from an eclectic selection of artists. Some the musicians themselves can be considered eclectic as well. The first disc in the list is from Jazz Bassist Esperanza Spalding. This is Spalding's second release and boy is it good! You'll be treated to unique jazz and jazz vocals by a Classically-trained musician with again, an eclectic personal and musical style. She's being considered by many to represent the 'future' of jazz!

www.esperanzaspalding.com

The second disc is "Work to Do" by Carl Allen and Rodney Whitaker. These two jazz academicians join up for the second time on their sophomore release. You'll find a collection of Jazz-influenced hits from the R&B, Soul, and Gospel genres, remade sans-vocals, and striped down for a fresh approach to the music. Allen and Whitaker call in Kirk Whalum to lend his sax to the project and he does so in a pretty material way. You'll hear Whalum's influence on the project throughout.

www.carlallen.com
www.people.music.msu.edu/detail.asp?ContactID=27

The third is Lee Ritenour's "Six String Theory". Here, Ritenour, himself a guitarist extraordinaire, sought out some of the most renowned guitarists around to join him on this project. Ritenour orchestrates both originals and covers of well-known pieces of work. "Rit" as he is also known, brings in a few vocal performances by a variety of guests to really make things interesting, including Sting, Tracy Chapman, B.B. King and Keb' Mo'.

www.leeritenour.com

A sleeper disc this time out is Sandy Cressman's "Sempre no Coração". This is a really neat find. Cressman performs a wide array of Portuguese and Brazilian tunes and is accompanied by an outstanding group of musicians. Cressman has a lovely voice for sure, but her band is equally excellent. It features a collection of lesser-known West Coast musicians, but you'd not know these weren't big label artists. You can learn more about Sandy and her work at:

www.homenagem-brasileira.com/fr_home.cfm
or www.facebook.com/sandy.cressman

The selection of the month is "Present Tense" by James Carter. Carter is a prolific reed / woodwind player, performing on Baritone, Tenor, Soprano and Alto Saxes, Bass Clarinet and Flute. This disc highlights Carter's outstanding chops throughout. The recording is lush and the Bass Clarinet and Baritone Sax offers great depth and robustness to the disc that is very enjoyable. There is a wide array of musical flavors, with a noticeably Latin hint on several tracks.

www.aiartists.com/jcarter/index.html

The sixth disc is a "flashback" to 1993 from the fantastic trio of Modeski, Martin, and Wood. This was their second release and is one of my favorites by the group. In addition to the really unique music, considered a new genre called "avant-groove", the recording is also well done. It highlights each of primary trio members nicely in the recording and includes five additional musicians that really get things hopping. This disc, a 're-discovery', is now on my favorites list. Try it, it might end up on yours as well.

www.mmw.net

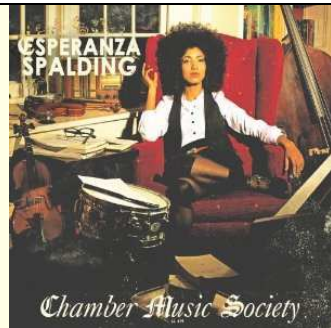
Until next time, enjoy the music. Please keep those notes, suggestions, and recommendations coming!

Remember; send me an email with your feedback about THE JAZZ JOURNAL.

THANKS!



Don
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Esperanza Spalding: Chamber Music Society

Esperanza Spalding and Gil Goldstein: Producers
Heads Up Records: Released August 2010

Mastered: Paul Blakemore

Audio Quality/Music: 4.5/4.5

Genre: Contemporary Jazz

She may be small, but this disc is BIG! The New Yorker magazine considers Esperanza Spalding the “new hope for jazz”. I do buy the hype a bit, as Esperanza has a unique persona and image that is appealing to many, across many ages and backgrounds. She’s got the hip, chic, unique look to connect with the progressive, younger audience, yet her musical chops and style will keep even the most hard-core jazz purists’ attention. Plus she’s kind of cute! In the same way that Diana Krall has captivated and connected with so many, Esperanza has the opportunity to do the same.

Chamber Music Society is a very nice body of work that is very well executed. The music is pure, and not adulterated with lots of techno-garbage or samples or overdubs. The very nice surprise on this disc is that in addition to her skill on the bass, she can sing too! Spalding is joined by a very talented group of musicians including Terri Lynn Carrington on Drums, and featuring vocalist Milton Nascimento on the tune “Apple Blossom”. The music is awash with Spalding’s very delicate Acoustic Bass, accompanied by Piano, Percussion, Guitar, Violin, Viola, and Cello. Imagine a blend of jazz and chamber viola, violin, and bass, with vocals layered on top. This is a really good, refreshing take on jazz music!

Spalding shows off her depth of composition. Her formal training is evident, and her creative abilities are front and center. Don’t look for big band swing, or hip fusion, or a bit of funk here. You will find a very “Serious” nature to the music, but not too serious. It’s as if Spalding wants to ensure you know she’s classically trained, but can also just groove as well. Check out her bio on Wikipedia and you’ll be impressed with her range of musicianship, training, and cultural background and experiences.

The recording is also absolutely fantastic. Most instruments are clearly separated in the mix and her voice is just perfect. The only criticism is of the featured artist’s instrument, which on a few tracks, is a bit ‘muddy’ or no pun intended...”bass-y”. This however is a minor glitch in an otherwise outstanding work. A Jazz Album of the Year nominee it must be!

Listen to Audio Samples at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Chamber-Music-Society-Esperanza-Spalding/dp/B0030FHMKO/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1283037736&sr=1-1



Carl Allen and Rodney Whitaker: Work to Do

Carl Allen, Rodney Whitaker, Al Pryor: Producers
Mack Avenue Records: Released: May 2009

James Farber: Recording Engineer

Audio Quality/Music: 3.5/3.5

Genre: Contemporary Jazz

Carl Allen and Rodney Whitaker team up again for their second disc – *Work to Do*. Their first release – *Get Ready* (2007) was fantastic for a Freshman debut. *Work to do* is good, but I found the influence of Kirk Whalum (sax) a bit heavy in the tunes. It was almost a “Kirk Whalum featuring Carl Allen and Rodney Whitaker” feel at times. This is not to say that Kirk is not a good musician, he is, BUT this is not his disc...and his style is VERY distinct. That said, this disc offers an array of musical influences in the selection of the tunes, predominantly covers, from the R&B, Gospel, and Pop genres.

Rodney Whitaker’s bass playing is solid and fluid throughout, and Carl Allen is super tight on the drums as well. The title cut is of course the R&B cover of the Isley Brother’s tune from the early 70’s. You’ll find jazz takes on many popular Soul, Gospel, even Pop tunes including Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On”; the Beatles “Eleanor Rigby”; and Donnie McClurkin’s “Speak to My Heart”. The tunes and arrangements are well-done, but at times seem a bit “wedding reception-band-like”... not enough depth, sharpness, or as ‘tight’ as you would expect from this caliber of musicians. This critique is not typical of all the tunes, just a few.

Despite the shortcomings here, the disc is still very good overall. When Whitaker, Allen, or Whalum stretch out, you get superb playing as you would expect. Each is able to really show off a bit on several tunes. The tracks “Grahamstown” and “Relativity” for instance gives Whalum, Whitaker, and Allen good workouts and are tracks that create some of the musical tension and improvisation required to take a jazz track to another level. “Eleanor Rigby” also gives most of the artists an opportunity to showcase a bit, particularly Allen’s drumming.

The recording quality is generally very good. All instruments are independently mic’ed and presented in a very distinct way. “Work To Do” is quite an apropos title for the disc; very good, but needs work. Enjoy it!

Listen to Audio Samples at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Work-Carl-Allen-Rodney-Whitaker/dp/B001URRHH6/ref=pd_bxgy_m_img_b



Lee Ritenour: *Six String Theory*

Produced By: Lee Ritenour
 Concord Records: Released June 2010
Audio Quality/Music: 4.0/4.0
 Genre: Contemporary Jazz / Fusion

Lee Ritenour is one of the most well-respected Jazz guitarists around. *Six String Theory* is his latest project and the cast of guitarists on the disc is a testament to the kind of company he keeps and is respected by. John Scofield, Keb' Mo', Steve Lukather, George Benson, B.B. King, Mike Stern, and Neal Schon are just a partial listing of the guest guitarists that perform here. There is a clear Blues slant to the overall vibe of the disc, with a few Jazz tracks interspersed. This is not the smooth-Jazz Lee Ritenour, but the collaborating, hard hitting Ritenour most are not familiar with.

The opening track "Lay It Down" seems to do just that; lay down the tone for the rest of the disc. Scofield and Ritenour really "lay down" some mean guitar riffs and licks for awesome Fusion. Immediately after "Lay It Down", you roll right in to Keb' Mo's distinct modern-Blues sound with Taj Mahal's harmonica and vocals and a little funk undertone on "Am I Wrong".

The disc is comprised of both Ritenour originals as well as remade covers from Tracy Chapman, Sting, and Kevin More (aka: Keb' Mo'). The third track "L.P." (for Les Paul) features three guitarists tearing up the super-smooth licks with the famous 'Les Paul sound'. Tracy Chapman's "Give Me One Reason" (track four) is a soulful, bluesy rendition featuring Joe Bonamassa and Robert Cray. This is a HOT track!

Track five, "68" is hard hitting Jazz-Fusion featuring screaming rock guitars and a funk groove underneath. "In Your Dreams" (track 6) features a more laid back approach, but still highlighting electric guitar front and center by Lukather, Ritenour, and Schon. George Benson appears on the next two tracks "My One and Only Love", and "Moon River". Benson solos in the first and is joined by Joey DeFrancesco and band on "Moon River", done here with a nice swing groove.

"Why I Sing the Blues" is next and features B.B. King, Keb' Mo', Vince Gill, and Johnny Lang. You'll hear classic B.B. mixed with an up-tempo groove, Keb' Mo's classic vocal sound, and Vince Gill's lush and silky voice layered in. "Daddy Longlicks" is a solo acoustic guitar piece by Joe Robinson and is real delight. Robinson plays at a blistering speed and is flawless. Additionally, this track is fantastically recorded and is real highlight and standout tune on the disc.

The remaining five tunes are of equally various styles, including more of the same range of the first ten tracks. Two of these five highlight acoustic guitar performances that are both great music AND great audiophile tracks, particularly "Drifting" (#12) by Andy McKee.

If you want a disc with a great showcase of guitarists, is well-recorded, and features several various styles of jazz and fusion music. THIS IS IT!

Listen to Audio Samples at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/6-String-Theory-Lee-Ritenour/dp/B003K025TQ/ref=sr_1_1?s=gateway&ie=UTF8&qid=285628114&sr=8-1



Sandy Cressman: *Brasil- Sempre no Coração*

Sandy and Jeff Cressman: Producers.
 Cressman Music Records: Released July 2005
Audio Quality/Music: 4.0/4.0
 Genre: Contemporary Vocal Jazz / Brazilian Jazz

Anytime you discover a talented "new" artist, it's an exciting feeling. That is certainly the case here with Sandy Cressman. The difference here though is she's really not a new artist, just new to me. I discovered her disc through the Atlanta Jazz Lover's blog recently.

"*Sempre no Coração*" is Cressman's follow-up disc to her 1999 release "*Homenagem Brasileira*". The album is produced by her husband, Jeff Cressman and features a really talented group of musicians forming the band. The musicians; Marcos Silva, keyboards; David Belove, Bass; Celso Alberti, drums; Harvey Wainapel, sax; Mike Spiro, percussion; Jeff Cressman and Natalie Cressman, Trombone, are from the Bay Area of California and together form one of the tightest ensembles I've heard in this genre.

Cressman has a wonderfully delicate, yet confident voice and is extremely articulate as she sings in Portuguese throughout the disc. There are lovely ballads along with several more up-tempo tracks to provide you with a nice mix of work and keeps things exciting and engaging. The tracks are a collection of lesser-known Brazilian tunes and are not the same stable of typically redone and overdone Brazilian tunes we hear all the time. This gives the disc a very authentic presence, and coupled with this awesome band, really takes the listener to new musical territory. Of particular note, keyboardist Marco Silva and Saxophonist Harvey Wainapel really shine here and add a real depth to the work.

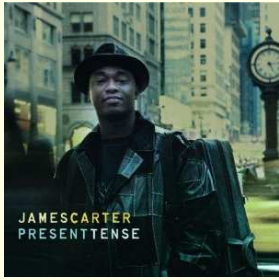
In addition to great music, the disc is also very well recorded. The entire production seems to be a Cressman-family affair, with Sandy on vocals, husband Jeff on Trombone and at the mixing board, and Natalie on Trombone. Jeff's work here is nicely done. All the instruments of the band are clear and balanced in the mix, with nothing overpowering anything else. One of the nice characteristics of Brazilian music is the presence of lots of percussion. Mr. Cressman captures the various percussion apparatus in a very detailed way, but again, never overdone. Sandy's vocals are captured and presented beautifully on top of everything without any hint of sibilance. The overall mix has just a hint of compression, but still offers a good sense of air and depth to the soundstage.

If you're looking for some "new" music, this would be a nice addition to your collection.

WELL DONE CRESSMAN FAMILY!

Listen to Audio Samples at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Brasil-Sempre-no-Cora%C3%A7%C3%A3o/dp/B0013RAWM0/ref=sr_1_3?s=gateway&ie=UTF8&qid=1285633984&sr=8-3



James Carter: *Present Tense*
 Michael Causcuna: Producer
 Universal Music: Released May 2008
Audio Quality/Music: 4.0/4.5
 Genre: Modern Bop

James Carter made his formal debut back in the 1990's as many of the "Young Lions" were emerging onto the Jazz scene. This group of musicians was intent on breaking new ground musically, but simultaneously and staunchly honoring the roots of the Jazz idiom. Carter has since emerged as a serious contributor to the Jazz scene, and has found his stride on "Present Tense". Carter exhibits that he is able to eloquently blend traditional "Bebop" with cutting edge modernism. Carter is a phenomenal musician, demonstrating his chops on several instruments: Soprano, Tenor, and Baritone Saxes; Flute, and Bass Clarinet. He's joined by an outstanding band including Dwight Adams, Trumpet and Flugelhorn; D.D. Jackson, Piano; Rodney Jones, Guitar; Manes Genus, Bass; Victor Lewis, Drums; and Eli Fountain, Congas and Percussion.

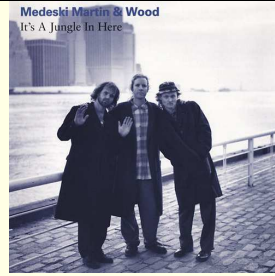
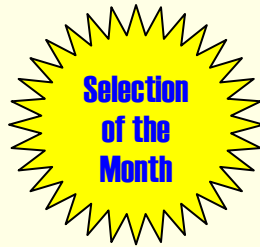
"Present Tense", according to Carter, is a disc that demonstrates his state of mind musically at that time, (i.e. "present tense") in his career. He states his musical moods often vacillate from serene to extreme at any given time, and he's tried to capture a big part of that range on this project. Carter in many places on the disc really pushes the envelope of improvisation right up to the edge of "Free Jazz/ Avant Garde" style, while keeping a contemporary feel with a nice groove underneath. After he's pushed you out to that edge, he reels you back in with a beautiful ballad. What a ride!

The first track, "Rapid Shave", kicks things off full steam and you know this is going to be good. It's fast and furious and really swinging. Track 2, "Bro. Dolphy" features Carter on Bass Clarinet and an awesome groove and swing. The tune ebbs and flows from quiet melodies to swinging groove, all the while the lovely Bass Clarinet is in full bloom, robust and woody in the recording mix. "Pour Que Ma Vie Demeure" is next and Carter here shows off his Soprano Sax beautifully. "Sussa Nita" follows with a nice acoustic guitar feature in a Latin Jazz salsa vibe, beautifully recorded as well. "Song of Delilah" is an exploration tune with a certain randomness in the beginning, but evolves into a funky little groove and heavy upright bass line. Carter pulls out the flute on "Dodo's Dance" for a light, swinging track featuring Dwight Adams on trumpet and Rodney Jones on guitar. "Shadowy Sands" cruises in next with Carter again on Bass Clarinet. This tune has a nice samba rhythm and outstanding Bass Clarinet features. The pace quickens again with "Hymn of the Orient", a 'hot' track featuring Carter's blistering speed in his improvisations, again pushing his horn out to it's limits. All of the musicians attempt to keep pace with Carter and his fury and Lewis' licks on drums. This is a fun track. The last two tracks; "Bossa J. C." and "Tenderly" finish out the disc nicely. As the name implies "Bossa J.C." has a nice Bossa-Nova feel and "Tenderly" is a quiet ballad you'll recognize.

The recording is well done, and the music is outstanding. Try It Now!

Listen to Samples at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Present-Tense-James-Carter/dp/B0013NFMQ2/ref=sr_1_2?s=gateway&ie=UTF8&qid=1285893355&sr=8-2



Modeski, Martin and Wood: *It's a Jungle in Here*
 Jim Payne: Producer
 Gramavision Music: Released 1993
Audio Quality/Music: 4.5/4.5
 Genre: Contemporary Jazz/Fusion

This is the "flashback" disc definitely worth checking out. Modeski, Martin and Wood (MM&W) catapulted their journey to Jazz stardom with this disc. This is the second disc in their discography and clearly a bit of a landmark moment for the band. Prior to this disc, MM&W had been mostly a local 'jam band' and had been primarily an acoustic jazz band before that. John Modeski added the electric organ as a matter of convenience when traveling, as hauling around an acoustic piano was of course totally impractical. That led to the evolution of the so-called "avant-groove" sound that has become distinctly the MM&W sound.

John Modeski mans the organ and piano; Billy Martin owns drums and percussion, and Chris Wood is on Bass. Recorded and produced in 1993, this disc was almost futuristic at the time. MM&W had a style of music that mixed elements of funk, fusion, rock, and avant garde/freestyle into a really unique jazz soup. These guys were politely pushing the music right to the boundaries, away from the smooth melodies and rhythmic syncopations of traditional jazz. The rest of the band is comprised of several outstanding musicians on Trombone, Flugelhorn, Trumpet, Saxophone, and Guitar.

The first cut, "Beeah" starts immediately with a hip, almost funk backbeat on the drum by Martin, but with Chris Wood cruising on bass, and Modeski offering a Sly Stone - meets - Jimmy Smith organ sound. This track is immediately followed by a sly groove and melodious tune entitled "Where's Sly". "Shuck It Up" is next. This is an upbeat tune with a New Orleans second-line riff that is so distinctive, writers Modeski and Martin must have been in the French Quarter on Mardi Gras day when they wrote this tune. "Sand" is a beautiful melody next on the list. It is an all acoustic set and Chris Wood's bass is elegant, yet has a strong presence on the track. A detour comes up next with "Worm". The band takes off on a quirky sort of Willy Wonka start to the tune, with out of tune chords being played over a sing-song, nursery rhyme-like melody. You're thinking at this point..."What is this?!?" but then...The tune turns on a dime and immediately takes off on a swinging run that you immediately hear the influences of MM&W's time playing with John Scofield. Chris Wood again showcases his skills on upright bass using the bow with some free-style, distortion-like playing. All the while Chris Martin is keeping the groove going with a steady drum beat. The rhythm stops then Martin solos extensively, accompanied by a wide array of percussion effects.

The rest of the album is chock full of more of the same high energy, complex rhythms, and extremely unique tunes. The recording quality is absolutely fantastic, especially Chris Wood's bass and the percussion. Listening to this now 17 year-old disc, you'll still feel like you've discovered something new. Your speakers will love this disc as well!

Listen to Samples at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Jungle-Here-Modeski-Martin-Wood/dp/B000003228/ref=sr_1_18?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1285976423&sr=1-18

NOTES:**Audio Quality:**

- 1 Fair (Put on the headphones, but with some other music)
- 2 Average: compressed, little detail and 'air', some edginess
- 3 Above Average: less compressed, better details
- 4 Very Good: good soundstage, depth, detail, 'air', clarity, no edginess
- 5 Excellent: impeccable recording, engineering

Music:

- 1 Poor: (Don't Bother)
- 2 Fair: (Better get it cheap!)
- 3 Average: (50% of the music is engaging, or breaks new ground)
- 4 Above Average: (50 – 75% of the music is engaging, or breaks new ground)
- 5 Excellent: (MUST HAVE! Not a bad track on the disc! Highly skilled musicianship, excellent compositions, excellent arrangements).