

Welcome AVCoA Members!

If you like the Jazz genre of music, I think you will find the Jazz Journal helpful to you. I hope so!

“Jazz” as a term is one of the most misrepresented forms of music in today’s audio world. The term has been applied to all sorts of music, everything from the proverbial “elevator music” (MUZAK) to that bordering on mainstream hip-hop. If the term is so misrepresented and misunderstood, how on earth can I ever manage to keep the reviews “between the ditches” so to speak? With so many variations of a theme, the music and artists must be so plentiful, you could never possibly review every version, style, iteration, or sub-genre of Jazz.

In my opinion, THAT my friends IS what makes Jazz such an interesting format of music! Let your ears guide you. IF you like the music, in the end, that is all that matters. Regardless of what title or genre you assign to it. I will however attempt to keep the core of the music reviewed “Between the ditches”, avoiding heavy emphasis on music and artists that might be considered extremely experimental, or out on the fringes of the predominant mainstream paths.

Each month, I will attempt to provide an objective review of approximately four various compact disc or LP titles in the Jazz genres. I will provide a brief synopsis of the music, attempting to be as simplistically descriptive as possible. I will review newly released content as I discover it or it is made available to me, but will also include a considerable amount of previously released material from various artists.

I will often use the categories as listed on “JazzRadio.com” internet radio (<http://www.jazzradio.com/>), as this will provide a widely accessible medium that will allow readers to continue to explore other artists that perform in the same general style. One thing to keep in mind...many of the most widely known Jazz musicians play or have played in a wide variety of the various styles, making the ability to “pin the artist down” a bit challenging for some. Again, this further adds to the intrigue of the Jazz genre.

One of the most widely known mainstream “smooth jazz” artists that this applies to is Kenny G. Kenny G. is known predominantly by current listeners as the smooth jazz, Christmas Album, soprano sax guy. His current music releases and those of the past 10 years or so have been in this smooth jazz, almost Easy Listening format. Kenny G. (Kenny Gorelick) WAS though a very serious contributor to

the late 70’s, early 80’s fusion group with another contemporary Jazz musician, Jeff Lorber in the very popular Jeff Lorber Fusion Group. To listen to Kenny G’s playing now, compared to his performances with Jeff Lorber Fusion are about as different as hearing two completely different artists.

There are hundreds of similar stories. As musicians went through their musical “phases”, their material and performing styles often changed respectively. Think of names like Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Sarah Vaughn, and Chick Corea among others and you’ll begin to see where I’m going with this.

Lastly, I will also provide a few comments and a numerical rating regarding audio quality. I will apply a simple 1 – 5 rating scale (poor to phenomenal) for recording quality with some descriptive text to accompany it. Where possible, I will include the Amazon.com or BarnesandNoble.com link for the title. This will allow you to hear samples of the music online to consider for your purchase.

I welcome your feedback and suggestions about anything regarding this endeavor. This effort for me is a real labor of love, as I truly do “Love” Jazz music in all its iterations and want to “spread the love” as much as possible. My intent is to expose the audience to as much as possible and this should serve as a tool to aid you in expanding your music libraries at home or on your laptop or server.

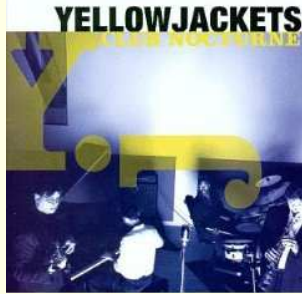
Feel free to contact me via email or by my trusty cell anytime!

Later!



Don

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Yellowjackets: *Club Nocturne*

Audio CD: Warner Brothers, Released September 22, 1998

Mastering/Audio Quality/Music: ADD / 3.5 / 4.0

Genre: Contemporary / Fusion

This is the 14th release of the group and one of the most enjoyable releases of their discography. Jazziz and Amazon.com both gave it favorable reviews when it was released back in 1998. Nocturne will expose you to a much softer vibe as compared to some of the band's more edgy fusion of their early releases. There is also a good sampling of familiar voices on the disc to complement the quartet's groove.

Leader Russell Ferrante's rolling style of acoustic piano is crisp and delicate but not hidden in the background. Bob Mintzer's sax is velvety smooth, yet he explores a wide range of force throughout the disc. William Kennedy on drums pushes the quartet's tempo and provides several exciting runs on many pieces, and Jimmy Haslip's bass playing is a nice support, never overwhelming the tunes.

The disc begins with an uplifting "Spirit of the West", highlighting Ferrante's ivory keys cruising along with a spirit of riding down Highway 1 along the West Coast overlooking a beautiful coastline, on a clear So Cal day with the top down. Each player has a featured run.

Track two, "Stick to it I've Ness" starts with Ferrante's solo piano, followed by each player easing their way into the piece, much like a pack of little kids sneaking their way into the toy box while mom's not looking. By the time all the players are involved, the piece evolves into an ebb and flow of both heavy groove-laden bass and tight solos with Mintzer stretching out on sax about mid way through. Each kid, err... musician here has their turn showing off what they can do with their toy, yet never to a point where mom might get annoyed.

Track three, a personal favorite; "Up from New Orleans" is a real toe-tapping, New Orleans second-line influenced piece featuring the scatty, yet velvety-smooth crooner Kurt Elling. Elling is in his element here, offering his articulate, yet soulful speak to the lyrics. Mintzer again takes a run about midway. You'll here the tuba and trombone riffs, as well as a Hammond organ sound here...awesome stuff! Kennedy keeps everything hopping with tight drumming.

Slice 4 is a hip, funky, track, "The Evening News" with all players cruising along, again with Kennedy's drumming pushing everything along. Listen for the players interjected "Grunts"...a neat treat.

"Even the Pain", is next featuring Jazz guitarist and vocalist Jonathan Butler. It has a Soweto-influenced percussive hint as does much of Butler's music. Butler is true-to-form with crystal clear vocals and meaningful lyrics. Lots of subtle percussive and digital nature sounds makes for nice listening.

"Love and Paris Rain" is up next featuring vocalist Brenda Russell. Russell lends her raspy tone here for an overall 'nice' piece, with Mintzer in the foreground throughout.

Number 7 is "The Village Church". Ferrante again rolls along with band-mates filling in all around and in-between each other, on both the up- and down- beats.

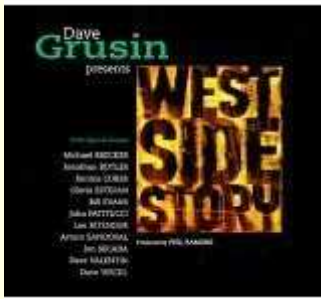
"Twilight for Nancy" follows. A simple, gentle piece that glides along. Kennedy's cymbal here is noticeably delicate but ever-present throughout with Ferrante and Mintzer filling the bulk of content.

"Automat" pushes us toward the end of the disc. Mintzer's sax gets to be up front this time, with Ferrante filling the gaps.

"All is Quiet" closes out the set, with Kurt Elling showing up again. The title says it all...a very quiet piece. The piece is a joy to listen to as each performer works to keep their place while Elling, in Chet Baker style, goes about his work...very delicately. Interesting cymbal work by Kennedy again gets highlighted in the recording...a test for your tweeters.

SAMPLES (At Amazon.com):

http://www.amazon.com/Club-Nocturne-Yellowjackets/dp/B00000AG9M/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1263828096&sr=1-1



Dave Grusin (presents): **West Side Story**

Phil Ramone, Producer.

Audio CD: N2K Music; Released September 23, 1997

Mastering / Audio Quality / Music: DDD / 4.0 / 4.0

Genre: Jazz Soundtrack (Big Band with Orchestra)

Dave Grusin is one of the most well-respected Jazz arrangers and musicians out there. Here on "West Side Story", he demonstrates his ability to add a new and unique flavor to an old work. The original West Side score by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim's verses is redone here with a complement of a literal "who's who" of contemporary Jazz and a Pop name or two as well.

The disc features a host of names like Michael Brecker, Jonathan Butler, Ronnie Cuber, Gloria Estefan, Bill Evans, John Patitucci, Lee Ritenour, Arturo Sandoval, Jon Secada, Dave Valentin, and Dave Weckl.

Grusin adds a progressive touch to the blend of Jazz, Latin and Classical influences in the arrangements while striving to remain true to the original soundtrack. The orchestrations are wonderful here, with strings filling the soundstage, intertwined with the Jazz players doing their thing, and the Pop vocalists interjecting crisp lyrics.

The disc begins with the Don Sebesky co-arranged "Prologue". You can envision the Jet's walking through the alleys and streets of New York with a certain confident strut as the piece progresses. It gets kicked off with the Brass and Woodwinds seemingly playing cat-and-mouse with various chairs in the sections. This is a wonderfully entertaining piece that moves into a full-on Latin vibe with Brass horns blazing over the melody. Arturo Sandoval's trumpet is slightly off to the left of the soundstage and is crisp throughout. Bill Evans super smooth sax with the rest of the sax section is off to the right, layering a sense of calm to the whole frenzy of the orchestra and band.

Track 2 is "Something's Coming". You know trouble is right around the corner as the Trombones start their sneaky intro off to the left, over Grusin's delicate piano. This piece develops from a few players into the complete orchestra's involvement, all with Patitucci's Bass striding along. Michael Brecker lets loose around 3:12 and runs the scales

flawlessly with his signature Tenor sax sound hanging out on the right. Then the piece moves back to the sneaky Trombones creeping in again as the orchestra fades.

"The Jet Song" follows with Dave Weckl's drum beat, Grusin's piano, then the sax, trombones, flutes and other woodwinds. Ronnie Cuber's Baritone Sax provides some beautifully deep tones off on the right side around 2:00 and is layered over a swinging groove. A George Young piccolo solo follows anchored over on the left. The muted trumpets and brass sections are always lurking in the back. Grusin gets his chance to provide his solo stamp around 5:30 by tickling the ivories for about a minute before the crescendo and then the swinging end.

"Maria", arguably one of the most recognized pieces of the soundtrack eases in next. Vocals are by Jonathan Butler, a unique choice perhaps for a Latin-inspired work, but Butler's velvety voice is transparent right in the center of the soundstage. The horn section here is prominent with Sandoval's trumpet ever so crisp accompanied by the occasional grunt of the big saxes.

"Cool", track 5 has a great acoustic standard feel with Grusin on piano, Patitucci on upright bass, and Weckl's drum opening the track. Lee Ritenour steps in for a solo around 1:30 for a glorious run that has him standing front and center. Patitucci steps in and out on the Upright Bass keeping things interesting as the horns take a break. A "Big Finish" has all players pushing for the end forcefully.

"Tonight" is a beautiful arrangement with Gloria Estefan providing her signature voice to the song. Strings are textured throughout and a warm Michael Brecker Tenor Sax solo stands out. Oh, and don't miss Lee Ritenour on Acoustic Guitar just kind of hanging out in the wings providing a nice compliment to the overall arrangement.

Grusin opens "I Feel Pretty" with solo keyboard, accompanied by only a percussive triangle and Dave Valentine on Flute for about 1:15 with only a bit of added percussion. BUT THEN, the Latin groove kicks in full force with a FUNKY beat and Valentine continuing his poetic flute playing throughout. The piece returns to Grusin, percussion, and flute for a lovely and delicate end. Don't you see the butterflies and sunflowers in the meadow?

"One Hand, One Heart" is a nice flowing piece that provides a bit of respite from the energy of most of the earlier tracks. There are nice strings intertwined with the Jazz players, and Grusin again giving us a feature on piano.

Jon Secada croons next on "Somewhere". His melodic tone comes right to center stage with the full orchestra filling the wings. The Jazz guys take a step back in the arrangement, making more room for the orchestration, but not disappearing. Bill Evans treats us again over on the right with a nice Soprano Sax highlight.

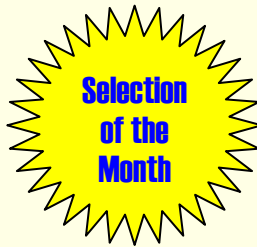
(“West Side Story” continued):

Finishing out the disc is track 10, “America”. The track starts with a very peaceful chant and subtle arrangement, exploding around 1:55 into a hard-charging swing. The horns are back a blazing, with solo work by Sandoval, and Evans. If you don’t feel like dancing the Samba here, you’re not American!

The recording is well-done and the disc comes with a comprehensive liner-notes booklet, all packaged in a mini-box sleeve with cover photo cut-out.

SAMPLES (At Amazon.com):

http://www.amazon.com/Dave-Grusin-Presents-West-Story/dp/B000001YO7/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1263833437&sr=1-1



Roy Haynes: **The Roy Haynes Trio**
Verve (April 2000)
Richard Seidel, Producer
Al Schmitt, Recording Engineer
Audio Quality / Music: 4.5 / 4.5
Genre: Modern Mainstream/ Piano Trio

Roy Haynes is an unsung hero of Jazz. His discography spans more than 50 years and he’s backed up and performed with true Jazz legends including a list too long to capture here in its entirety but includes these names for starters: Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Stan Getz, Sarah Vaughn, and Thelonius Monk!

Roy Haynes is performing at 75 years old on this recording and his playing is as snappy and fluid as ever. He’s partnered with Danilo Perez on piano and Bassist John Patitucci, both well-respected and produced players in their own right. This is a classic straight ahead jazz trio performing some wonderful compositions written by Bud Powell, Miles Davis, Sarah Vaughn, Chic Corea, and Thelonius Monk.

(Roy Haynes Trio, Continued):

For a tour of the disc:

Tracks 1 through 6 are studio productions recorded in New York in 1999. Tracks 7 through 10 were recorded live in Boston the same year.

Track 1, “Wail” (Bud Powell) gets things off to a snappy start. Perez’s piano is smooth and flowing, Haynes drumming is crisp, and Patitucci cruises along in the back on bass. You can faintly hear, who I presume is Perez, scatting along with his playing. This is a nice rolling piece featuring a Hayne’s solo around 2:20 in.

Track 2, “Question and Answer” (Pat Metheny) is up next and starts off with Haynes’ sticks, followed by Perez and Patitucci forming the blended trio sound. Haynes’ playing is very delicate but clearly at the center of the rhythm. Perez again croons in scat form along with his playing ever so subtly. A nice Patitucci acoustic bass solo is about 3:45. Around 6:00, lots of Haynes percussion surfaces for a real treat.

“Shulie a Bop” (George Treadwell-Sarah Vaughn) is track three and is a wonderful tune featuring a Haynes solo right off the bat around 1:10 in, followed immediately by Patitucci’s dexterous fingering on the upright bass. This piece swings! Each player gets to ‘work it out’ on this piece, but none ever overpowers the arrangement.

“Dear Old Stockholm”, follows. The trio keeps the tempo rolling throughout....but around 5:30 Haynes winds it out pushing to the end of piece with a nice drum run.

“It’s Easy to Remember” starts with Haynes leading off. A very nice piece. Patitucci has an infectious bass line throughout that comes and goes, giving you a sense of “Hey! Get back over here...don’t go away!”

“Folk Song” (Chic Corea) is a hard charging piece with a hint of Danilo Perez’s Latin flavor intertwined with Corea’s arrangement. Corea’s music is supposedly responsible for Perez diverting his classical musical training to pursue Jazz. If you are at all familiar with Chic Corea’s music, you will recognize it here for sure. SALSA time everyone!!!

The “LIVE” set kicks off with “Sippin’ at Bells” (Miles Davis). Perez and Patitucci play in unison in the opening minute or so...incredible playing by Patitucci just to keep up with Perez’s ivory tickling. The piece pauses for a quick Haynes solo, then a Patitucci solo and then more from each in a back and forth pace. This is great musicianship here! Hayne’s drumming is all over the room as you listen to his solos. The audience is finally in the mix around 4:05 and you feel like you’re in the little Jazz club with them. Perez gets in to full gear next and his piano playing is nothing less than superb here. GREAT TRACK!

“Bright Mississippi” (Thelonius Monk) is a great performance, with all players having an opportunity to be highlighted.

(Roy Haynes, continued):

Around 7:00 Haynes takes on a good run with Perez following suit. The audience is right there with you.

"Prelude to a Kiss" is the ninth track and offers more of the great playing of each artist. Nothing more to say here.

The last cut is "Green Chimneys", another Monk tune. This is a long (12+ minutes) track and arguably the best...saved for last. It starts with Haynes' soloing, using all BUT his snare initially. Haynes runs for about 2-1/2 minutes before the rest of the trio joins. At this point, HOLD ON! This piece gets into a 'zone' where each player is carefully restraining their playing while the other takes a solo. Both Patitucci and particularly Perez really push their instruments here...particularly Perez, even banging the keys occasionally; Patitucci providing the occasional slap of the bass. You can hear the scattling in the background...very cool! The piece swings all the way to end once it starts rolling, coming in for a straight landing with a simple one note.

This disc offers a very nice recording. The mikes appear to be a simple set up that offers a "you are there" feel on both the studio and the live tracks.

SAMPLES at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Haynes-Trio-Danilo-Perez-Patitucci/dp/B00004SRIF/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1263833573&sr=1-1



Medeski, Martin, and Wood(MMW); **TONIC** (Live)
Blue Note Records, April 25, 2000
MMW, Producers.

Audio Quality / Music: : 4.5 / 4.0

Genre: Eclectic blend of Avant -Garde and Fusion Trio

This disc is filled with great treats for you. If you've never heard of Medeski, Martin, and Wood...you now know about them. MMW has a real unique sound that will draw you in with a hip, often funky beat, layered underneath freestyle, Avant -Garde, and Improvisational elements.

MMW is comprised of: John Medeski on piano, Billy Martin on drums and percussion, and Chris Wood on bass. The disc is recorded live in 1998 at the famous NY jazz spot, TONIC...hence the name for the same-titled disc. The performance utilized very little sound reinforcement because of the smallness of the venue. Additionally, the trio performed using all acoustic instruments, a move that harkens back to their roots.

(Medeski, Martin, and Wood, continued):

MMW has a following that partakes in buying and wearing "MMW" paraphernalia as a testament to their loyalty and enjoyment of their unique style of music.

MMW started their performing tours in the late 90's but traveling with such large acoustic instruments as Upright Bass and Grand Piano proved to be a logistical challenge. As a result, for practicality, the band adapted electronic versions of the instruments for their tours, resulting in a very modern and hip sound that garnered large crowds.

TONIC, the disc, offers the same power, quirkiness, hipness, and vibe that makes MMW special, this time though, the acoustic instrumentation yields a very 'natural' presence and a somewhat 'truer' jazz feel...a personal preference for me.

Track one, "Invocation" launches the disc with an Afro-Cuban feel of percussion instruments leading off. Medeski really cuts loose about 2:10 into the track, pushing the limits of mainstream playing, then transitioning right back into a swinging and grooving beat. Chris Woods' bopping bass is right along for the entire ride as Medeski plays piano including some edgy banging of the keys.

"Invocation" seamlessly transitions right in to track 2; "Afrique". Here, the trio follows Woods' groove on bass, moving all around from random, Avant-Garde style to a nice swinging groove. Woods doesn't get his opportunity to really stretch out until late in the track, followed by a Billy Martin drum solo.

"Seven Dead Lies" track 3, creeps in without even a pause from track 2. Here, you'll hear all three musicians showing off their talents as the long (8mins) track continues. Listen closely and you'll hear Woods stroking his Bass in a Jaco Pastorius fusion mode. Hold on, this track runs the gamut from swing to the freestyle of Fusion. All good though.

"Your Lady" reels you back in from the edge with a simple melody in the beginning that moves in and out in the piece. But wait...this piece changes its' feel and moves into the 'freestyle' space around 6:10 in, with lots of improvisational playing particularly by Medeski incorporating the Melodica, and Wood on bass...then simply ends...what a ride!

"Rise Up" then gets started with a little Medeski rolling low octave playing and quickly moves into a nice swing groove with the full trio. BUT WAIT! Here we go again...MMW pauses the groove midstream for a Medeski solo...nice! Then the groove returns. Then another pause for a Wood bass solo over on the right channel that is technically speaking, "AWESOME"! The audience is pleased. Billy Martin takes his turn around 10:00 for a spin on the drum set...GOOD STUFF!

Again, in the tradition of live performances, MMW moves straight on to track 6, "Buster Rides Again". This is a nice cruising little tune with a Latin flair. It's a bit of a sonic treat with the drums, percussion, and rim-sticking highlighted over on the left, and Woods' bass over on the right. Medeski is front and center tickling the ivories.

Another lengthy piece (11:32) is next with "Thaw". It begins with Medeski soloing with drum accents. A sonic treat is that you actually hear someone's, perhaps Woods, or the sound guy's chair or wooden floors squeaking and creaking over on the right as Medeski rolls along...you are there in the club! This is primarily an improvisational piece highlighting Medeski most prominently. All three musicians stretch out individually throughout the piece, but despite their individual directions, the piece has a real harmonious feel that keeps it all tied together somehow. Amid the chaos, there is real calm and real order here. Then, there it is, more order appears with Wood and Martin getting in sync and Medeski takes off on his tour of the black and white keys.

Closing out the set is "Hey Joe". This piece begins as a real contrast from the previous track with Medeski playing a very tender, bluesy melody, and Wood and Martin following suit. This is a gorgeous arrangement with the feel of having a smoke of a nice cigar, or sipping on your favorite Single Malt out on the patio by the fire after a "long night"! It's like the trio is saying; "Hey, we're exhausted; we hope you were pleased, now we're going to chill out for a minute...thank you very much!"

Samples at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Tonic-Medeski-Martin-Wood/dp/B00004SQ2F/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1263833738&sr=1-1