

The Jazz Journal

Audio Video Club of Atlanta
Don Smith, Contributing Writer

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Greetings AVCoA Members!

Welcome to the second edition of "The Jazz Journal", created to expand awareness and enjoyment of the Jazz music genre. The reviews are being posted to the A-VCOA.org website and distributed electronically via email as well to others around the country.

Thanks to everyone that has provided great insight, comments, recommendations, and general feedback about the first issue. I must say, I have been pleased with the interest in this undertaking. Many of you have sent me an email with particular questions about the discs reviewed or even some of the terminology of the idiom. THAT'S GREAT! It means folks are actually reading these, and that IS exciting!

One of the recommendations I received was to try to include new releases in the reviews as well. Of course, I'll do just that. Note however that some of the best and most representative discs of a particular artist are not necessarily their most recent. Also note that I will typically prefer to avoid the "new release" excitement placed on the release of a new disc by an artist as that effort is predominantly to get you to purchase that item. I have no motivation to push new release sales. I do however have motivation to have our reader's interest and appreciation in Jazz lead to purchasing Jazz releases of both the newest available discs and earlier ones as well. The more exposure and interest gained by readers, the more you will want to procure this music in all forms and releases of all available dates. Hopefully, this little effort will continue to elicit interest in attending Jazz concerts, listening to Jazz radio over the air, or online, buying CD's, LP's, or even MP3 downloads if that's your thing.

Since Audio-Video Club of Atlanta members value high-end audio-video systems and the wonderful sonics these systems are capable of reproducing, the reviews have a slight bias by integrating and describing general recording quality and audio characteristics of the discs. Typical music reviewers in most other publications outside of The Absolute Sound, Audiophile, or Sound and Vision, do not generally have ANY reference to recording quality. I will strive to help you identify, as often as possible, great additions to your libraries that not only offer great musicality and artistry, but great sonic quality as well...a "Dual Benefit"...twice the level of enjoyment!!

In Atlanta, and all over the country, there are numerous venues for listening to Jazz, and many stores to purchase the discs.

Some of the music I'll post here for reviews will be considered "out of print" or "discontinued". DON'T PANIC! Any disc I review, will at minimum be available online via www.Amazon.com, www.BarnesandNoble.com, other online music sites, or often directly from the artist's website. You might also be sure to contact one of our local disc-dealers, as these discs are frequently still currently available right down the street (check out Borders, Barnes and Noble, Decatur CD, Fantasyland, Warehouse Records, and any others you know about). Be sure to include the new and used stores in your visits also. Most of these stores allow you to audition any unsealed discs right on the spot and typically have many of the previously released works in their bins.

In this issue, we'll again take a tour of four discs. The selection of the month is the final recording session of Michael Brecker, entitled "Pilgrimage". THIS is an awesome disc that is all that Jazz is supposed to be.

We also tour around with a 1999 release solo effort from drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts, "Citizen Tain". Jeff has a tremendous history, particularly his stints with all three Marsalis brothers, Wynton, Brandford, and Delfaeyo, all featured on this disc. You should really enjoy this disc.

The third item is from Athens, Georgia - born, Paris-raised vocalist, Madeleine Peyroux. Her latest release (2009) here is "Bare Bones". Although considered a Jazz vocalist, you'll experience a variety of musical influences in her work.

Lastly, I'll wrap up with Carl Allen and Rodney Whitaker's "Get Ready". This is a contemporary, yet mainstream work that is influenced by, and mashed with a Motown sound and a touch of instrumental Gospel. This disc was a close second to Brecker's "Pilgrimage" for selection of the month.

I hope you'll enjoy the reviews and more importantly the music I've reviewed below. LET ME KNOW!!!

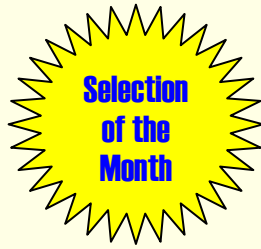
Thanks again and keep the e-cards and e-letters coming!

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

Later!



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Michael Brecker: Pilgrimage

Audio CD: (label) Heads Up. Released: May 22, 2007

Audio Quality/Music: 4.0 / 4.5

Genre: Contemporary Jazz

O.M.G.!!

Anyone with a teen or pre-teen in their home knows what that acronym means...right! Well it definitely applies to the 2007 release by the famed tenor saxophonist Michael Brecker. In case you didn't know, Michael died in January 2007 after a long battle with Leukemia.

Joining him on this disc was the unbelievable line-up of: Pat Metheny, Guitars; Herbie Hancock and Brad Mehldau, Piano; John Patitucci, Bass, and Jack DeJohnette on Drums. THIS IS A WICKED GROUPING!

Any one of these names alone garners musical respect in the Jazz world...but all of them assembled together results in a fierce piece of work. This disc captures his signature tenor sax sound as well as any of his previous works which includes a discography that numbers well in to the hundreds as a side man, and more than 25 as a leader or co-leader. You may recognize his name from his work with his brother Randy in the Brecker Brothers group that spanned from the 70's to the 90's, or perhaps as co-leader of the 80's jazz group Steps Ahead. If that doesn't do it, name a contemporary jazz musician or even many classic Rock or R&B bands and there's a good chance Michael has been a part of some project with them. Names such as: Aerosmith, Patti Austin, Average White Band, Chet Baker, George Benson, Chris Botti, James Brown, and Jonathan Butler are listed in his discography. These few are just representative samples of his contributions, and that's only with artist names that begin with the alphabet letter A through B!!

"Pilgrimage" is such a wonderful body of work...let's just get right to it. Track #1 is "Mean Time". Here you get tastes of each musician's capacity in this hard-charging, high energy piece. The interplay among the instruments and musicians is outstanding. Brecker (MB) pushes this funky track, seemingly daring the others to keep up with him.

Track 2, "Five Months from Midnight" takes us in a much calmer and serene direction, but far, far, far from boring or un-engaging. Michael's sax is right in the center, crisp, bold and super tight. He has a way of pushing his instrument to the edge. Pat Metheny's signature guitar is here prominently throughout as well. Mr. Brecker goes on a solo run around 5:45 that is absolutely fabulous.

Next up is: "Anagram". Mehldau's piano groove gets things going quickly. Patitucci strikes a nice compliment on Bass, and DeJohnette keeps the sticks moving, but it is Brecker himself, again which just seems to play every possible note of the scales in his runs, all in a manner that seems totally effortless. This is another high-energy piece that puts MB mostly on the right of the soundstage with everyone else spread across the soundstage. Metheny seems absent until about 4:30 but he then treats us to the unmistakable sound until about 6:30. The piece reveals the delicacy of each musician's touch, all the while hitting a hard rhythm and a solid almost funky groove. The last sonic treat is DeJohnette's drum solo at 9:35.

"Tumbleweed" is next. The track starts with just DeJohnette and Patitucci setting the pace, Mehldau again joins, followed by MB. Some nice effect chants of mysterious cultural origin are layered in also for a nice departure. Metheny again gives us a treat of his other classic sound; synth-guitar. Whose album is this, Metheny's or Brecker's? ...no matter...Brecker's right after with yet another great solo. He plays the run so blazingly fast you have to wonder how he does it. Patitucci and Mehldau seem to sit in the background on bass and piano watching the others just go crazy, all the while, kind of sitting by saying..."you go boy's...we'll stick right here...ya'll have fun!".

Track 5 is "When Can I Kiss You Again?" This is a soft and delicate piece in the opening several minutes, featuring MB of course and Metheny again lending his riffs. Herbie Hancock has a nice solo here in classic Herbie style; complicated, yet simple. The track gets progressively more aggressive, but a sudden return to delicacy evolves to take us home.

Track 6 is "Cardinal Rule". This is a very nifty track offering a great run by both Metheny and MB playing the melody together, followed by a very nice Patitucci (JP) Bass solo. JP sits off left plucking the big boy with dexterity that gives his big boy upright a very agile sound.

"Half Moon Lane" is number seven. A peek-a-boo vibe starts off the track with MB driving things. Mehldau on piano keeps to his signature rhythm style piano playing. Everything ends very simply as the track fades out.

Number 8, "Loose Threads", has a real cool stop and go tempo, with the entire melody and rhythm halting. Sonically, this creates an awesome artificial 'echo' effect in the soundstage that creates some neat drama. These hard-hitting crescendo's are scattered throughout the piece and are the impetus obviously for the "Loose Thread" title...something's a bit loose here! Oh yeah...Herbie Hancock's on this track complex chords and such, but so easy to follow.

The title track, #9 "Pilgrimage" is last. All the players get to free-style along on the first half, as MB is out front and center carrying the melody. The melody later shifts a bit to a nice little flow featuring Herbie Hancock's electric piano, culminating in a build of all the musicians and DeJohnette finally cutting loose near the end. The ending builds with a feel of a real "Pilgrimage" coming to an end.

This was Brecker's last disc, and what a phenomenal piece it is. It is absolutely one of, if not THE (IMHO) most representative and tight pieces of his solo discography.

Samples at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Pilgrimage-Michael-Brecker/dp/B000OHZJA0/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1266265452&sr=8-1



Jeff "Tain" Watts: *Citizen Tain*

Delfeayo Marsalis, Producer

Columbia Jazz (SONY); Released August 17, 1999

Audio Quality / Music: 3.5/4.0

Genre: Modern Mainstream Jazz

Jeff "Tain" Watts is an incredible drummer. I think that is a bit of an understatement. Jeff Watts cut his teeth working with the Wynton Marsalis band back in 1985. He later joined Marsalis brother Brandford in the Tonight Show band for many years. He's been with Brandford consistently every since.

"Citizen Tain" is a disc that pulls you in, gets you involved, and spits you out, then pulls you back in again. On this session with Jeff is great personnel including Reginald Veal and Eric Revis, Bass; Kenny Kirkland, Piano; Brandford Marsalis, Tenor Saxophone; Wynton Marsalis, Trumpet; and Delfeayo Marsalis, Trombone (trk 11). Delfeayo also produced the disc.

Beginning with Track #1, "The Impaler", you know immediately this is going to be good! Wynton and Brandford Marsalis playing together, and Jeff really swinging on the drums. Wynton Marsalis is of course in his element...trumpeting like none other. Kenny Kirkland's piano fills in while Wynton and Watts unleash their respective loads of fire on the listener. Ah, then there's Brandford. He takes off on Tenor Sax and shows that he is in fact one of the best and seems to be saying..."You thought my brother was good, check me out!!" Kenny Kirkland then shows off his piano on the right for a nice little run...all the while Jeff is keeping things tight with an occasional oomph or whack of the drum...just to keep your attention. Did we mention the primary artist's solo at 8:00...Tain let's you know..."this is MY disc!"

"Muphkin Man" is next and starts off like something from Charlie Brown or Dr. Seuss. Kenny Kirkland is seated off on the right on the piano playing, what at times seems comical, followed immediately by some very mature playing. Again, Watts does not overpower, but does keep you aware that he's back there playing. Aside from Kirkland's solos, Reginald Veal does a nice job on the Big Boy upright Bass also. As the piece progresses, you're pulled in to the melody for the rest of the track.

"Attainment", (track 3) gets kicked off with a fierce, and intense Watts solo. Here you get to hear Watts' more intense style. The recording was somewhat disappointing however of his solo as this could have been a "monster" had the recording gurus gotten that right. This even so is still a nice song, with very nice contributions by all involved, each taking a turn to be highlighted.

"Pools of Amber" starts with a lovely Kenny Kirkland solo. This is a very quite, gentle arrangement that seems quite "Valentine Day" appropriate. Sonically, Watt's drum is mic'd in a way that his cymbals and bass are left and right, but the snare (san's snare springs) is locked in on the left. This also makes for a nice nuance to the recording.

Track 5, "Bluetain, Jr." is a neat, swinging tune with a quirky little refrain that at first seems like an Inspector Gadget theme song, but quickly blends in nicely with the rest of the grooving quartet. Brandford Marsalis repeats the little refrain over on the left channel, and is followed alternately, then simultaneously with the same refrain by Kenny Kirkland on the right channel. A 'nice' track.

Number 6 is "Wry Koln". Tain kicks things off immediately with a solo that leads off the quartet. Tain's snare is anchored over on the left channel and Brandford's tenor primarily on the right with the Kenny Kirkland on piano. Eric Revis holds the bass down in the back. Kenny Kirkland's solo around 2:25 is a great exhibition of fine keyboard playing and Tain really keeps his foot on the gas driving the pace of the piece. Marsalis again shows his stuff with gusto and finesse' simultaneously with some nice free form, improvisation.

"Milk Shake-up Call" follows and begins with Tain's licks layered over background voices of news bulletins or some other type of verse reading and moves quickly (1:02) in to the next tune, "Paen (Marie, Jehanne, Karmia)". This is a lovely, but short (2:27) ballad featuring Brandford Marsalis throughout.

"Sigmund Groid" is next and begins with a nice Reginald Veal bass line to get things cruising. Kenny Kirkland and Marsalis quickly ease in and move the piece on to an easy groove with Tain of course keeping everything moving at the right pace. More Kirkland solos are enjoyable, anchored on the right channel. Again, Marsalis' tenor playing is lean and tight throughout.

"Trieste" is a lovely track that starts with Marsalis and Kirkland playing a nice lul-a-bye. Tain hangs out in the back, and transitions the piece from a soft, lush track into an awesome swinging set. Veal really gets the bass line rolling over on the left. Kirkland on the right, and Veal are quickly joined by Marsalis' tenor playing. This piece really gives Tain a long solo around 4:55.

"Bluetain's Big Adventure" is the culminating piece, and is one of my personal favorites. It picks up where "Bluetain" left off and brings Wynton Marsalis into the mix with some of his signature trumpet playing. Brandford on Tenor on the right, Wynton on the left, Tain, on the left, and the other Marsalis, Delfaeyo joins on Trombone for what ends up sounding like a jam session track with THREE Marsalis' boys doing their thing over a swinging groove. Only Pops Marsalis (Ellis) and drumming brother Jason are missing for a full-tilt Marsalis ensemble...this track is an audio delight with all the interplay of the horns back and forth from left to right and back again.

Samples at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00000JT4W/ref=s9_simi_qw_p15_i1?pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_s=center-2&pf_rd_r=1JPA65QR4QR2XRN7TF8X&pf_rd_t=101&pf_rd_p=470938631&pf_rd_i=507846



Madeleine Peyroux: *Bare Bones*

Larry Klein, Producer

Rounder Records. Released: March 2009

Audio Quality/Music: 4.0 / 3.5

Genre: Vocal Jazz (Female)

Although, Madeleine Peyroux is being considered a Jazz vocalist by most sources, her work could easily be considered an eclectic blend of Jazz, Folk, Pop, Rock and Blues. Her distinct, lush, sultry, and delicate voice has a way of executing all of these genres in a way that doesn't quite get boxed in to any one of them. Her band also does a great job of providing a musical backdrop for her voice that on almost every track takes you in a little different direction and has you saying..."This reminds me of ..." with the "of" being someone different each time. (Some say Billie Holiday).

Consider Ms. Peyroux a "local girl" as she was born in Athens, GA, but moved to Paris at an early age after living in several places in the U.S. She began touring with European café performers at 16 years old in Paris and continued that circuit for many years before having the opportunity to record her first album "Dreamland".

This disc is her third and is probably her most true performance as it is all her original material. Her previous efforts tended to include lots of covers, albeit nicely done, but nonetheless, others' works.

Her band is a cast of characters that include producer Klein on Bass; Vinnie Colaiuta, Drums; Dean Parks, Electric Guitars, Mandolin; Larry Goldings, Hammond Organ; Jim Beard, Wurlitzer piano; and Carla Kihlstedt, violin. Peyroux herself contributes on Acoustic Guitar. This blend of instruments makes for fine audio and is well recorded. Peyroux's voice is crisp and articulate throughout...no hint of 'sh' or 'spit' anywhere in the mix.

"Instead" is track one and immediately you want to say this sounds like "What a day for a daydream"...but it's not! This is her song and her vocals are clear and instruments are centered nicely, her guitar is nicely recorded and features a bluesy electric guitar of Dean Parks. This little tune is a feel good, toe-tapping deal that has you saying, "I like this chick!"

"Bare Bones", the title track is next. This is a mid-tempo jingle that gets Peyroux giving you a little blues vibe. If you like the Wurlitzer and Hammond sound, you'll LOVE this track. The tune has a kind of funky little beat that also has you bobbing your head while tapping your feet.

"Damn the Circumstances" is a simple and elegant piece that let's you hear mostly Peyroux's voice and guitar. She sings softly with a bit of melancholy that's actually quite pleasing despite the somewhat somber lyrics.

"River of Tears" takes on a Spaghetti Western soundtrack vibe. The track features very simple musical arrangements, as do most tracks, allowing you to hear her unique voice right up front and in the center.

"You Can't Do Me" is track 6 and is a fun-filled, groovy tune with a Steely Dan-ish beat and rhythm. It's actually one of my favorites on the disc. She tells 'them' that you can't 'do me' like you did before...it hurts so I'm ready this time. The music features all of the musicians blended very nicely, again the Hammond organ and Wurlitzer sound wonderful in the mix with Peyroux's voice crisply captured.

"Love and Treachery". What a title! This is a really beautiful arrangement of the band and Peyroux's vocals seem even more articulate here than on the previous tracks.

"Our Lady of Pigalle" is next. This is a nice track featuring more of the same simplistic arrangement, clearing the way for Peyroux's odd vocal styling.

"Homeless Happiness" features a solo by Peyroux on her acoustic guitar, and later the full band joins. This is yet another lovely tune highlighting Peyroux's unique voice.

The last three tracks ("To Love You All Over Again", "I Must Be Saved", and "Somethin' Grand"). Are all nice but none stand out as different from any of the previous tracks. All are well recorded and the music and lyrics on all three are pleasant to listen to.

Peyroux's voice is clearly the star of the show on this disc; as it should be. If you're looking for some nice quiet-time music, with a new vocal sound, this would certainly fit the bill.

Samples at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Bare-Bones-Madeleine-Peyroux/dp/B001KP2Y3K/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1266626437&sr=1-1



Carl Allen and Rodney Whitaker: *Get Ready*

Carl Allen/Rodney Whitaker/ Al Pryor: Producers
Mack Avenue Records. Released 2007

Audio Quality/Music: 4.0/4.5

Genre: Contemporary/Mainstream Jazz

Carl Allen (Drums) and Rodney Whitaker (Bass) have been performing together for over 20 years, primarily as accompaniment players with some of the greats of Jazz. They originally connected with the Terrence Blanchard-Donald Harrison Quintet many, many years ago and have formed a musical bond ever since. Allen has worked with some formidable greats such as Freddie Hubbard, Woody Shaw, Jackie McLean and Art Farmer. Whitaker is director of Jazz Studies at Michigan State University and it was his idea to revisit a few Motown classics on their Mack Avenue records debut. The line-up on this disc is spectacular including Rodney Jones, Guitar; Steve Wilson, Alto and Soprano Sax; Cyrus Chestnut, Piano; and Dorsey "Rob" Robinson, Organ.

From the very first note of Rodney Jones' guitar lick, you know this is going to be good! "La Shea's Walk" is the opening track and is absolutely fabulous. This is a groovy, swinging track with a fluid sense of both finesse and funk. You hear excellent New York musicians sitting back for an awesome Jam-session. Every player here is on their game and the recording mix is just right, leaving all solos highlighted at just the right touch while preserving the full impact of the full band. This track exhibits a very cool sense of stop-time in several places, creating that anxious feeling of waiting for the melody to continue during a sudden and brief break in the melody. Also in this track, you'll hear another essential characteristic of Jazz, the use of polyrhythms...the use of one time syncopation superimposed over the standard syncopation of the melody. A very nice piece indeed.

The Smokey Robinson written tune and title track "Get Ready" eases on next. Imagine the tune played in a Jazz arrangement with a Curtis Mayfield "Superfly" guitar lurking in the background...a nifty little flair. Rodney Jones gets to play extensively on this track and his guitar is wonderfully anchored on the right channel.

"Inner City Blues" (Marvin Gaye) is next and begins with a Whitaker solo on Bass. The beat kicks off around 1:30 with Rodney Jones featured on guitar, crisply recorded in the mix over on the right channel, and Steve Wilson on sax.

"Desperate Desire" is next. This track has Dorsey Robinsons' organ added to the mix. This track provides a 'churchy' or liturgical feel as a result of the organ. If you've ever been in an African-American Baptist church on Sunday, you'll hear a very familiar and somewhat uplifting and comforting song here. Pass the collection plate please!

"Alternative Thoughts" begins very simply then evolves into a nice Latin-influenced rhythm. Allen's drumming is highlighted. Again, Steve Wilson treats us to some nice Sax playing. The strings of the guitar and Allen's percussion are crisply recorded and offer a real audio delight. This is an up-tempo tune that really swings.

"Summer (The Sweet Goodbye)" is a track loaded with the use of simple scalar structure, overlaid with lots of improvisation from each soloist. It's a bopping tune that has you patting your foot furiously to keep up with the beat. Allen gets an opportunity to solo around 5:30 while the rest of the band pauses. The tune ends with a simple fortissimo by Cyrus Chestnut on Piano.

"Preference of Conviction" sounds like the score of a movie scene of a convicted felon headed for the death chamber with its deep, haunting, pulsating, rhythm. It has a real sinister element that is very addictive. This piece also exhibits heavy use of polyrhythmic elements. This makes for a very complex piece of work, but the simple primary beat, maintained throughout by the Bass line keeps order to the work.

"A Heart Inflamed, A Soul Enchanted" is a lovely ballad-like love song piece, with an easy melody and soft essence. Sit back and relax, to wonderful, melodic solos on piano and sax.

"We Fall Down", track 9, is another inspirational tune, performed often by contemporary Gospel artists. A personal favorite rendition is that done by Donnie McClurkin. This version honors the true spirit of the song, with a real light, up-tempo Jazz vibe. Wilson carries out the melody graciously and elegantly on the Sax. Dorsey Robinson's "organ-ing" puts you in the Church pew again. All players get an opportunity to show off as well, while Allen keeps the beat going on drums. This is a great arrangement of a wonderful Gospel standard, done with passion and fervor, but a gentleness fitting of the spiritual message of "We fall down, but we get up"!

The last track is "Now Silence". The track is a nice rhythmic tune featuring Rodney Jones, this time on acoustic instead of electric guitar. This tune has a bit of a Dixieland swing, mixed in with contemporary and mainstream Jazz. Jones' acoustic guitar playing is fantastic and fantastically shown off boldly on the right channel of the mix.

Samples at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Ready-Carl-Allen-Rodney-Whitaker/dp/B000OONOXM/ref=sr_1_7?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1266705411&sr=8-7