

the JAZZ PROJECT

BY JEAN-KEITH FAGON

Restored, Returned •••

Tord Gustavsen Ensemble, ECM

Historically, jazz groups are made up of congenitally inward-looking musicians, folks who believe that jazz music is of a higher calling of personal achievement and that therefore those of us on the outside (i.e. listeners) should deem being in the audience a privilege. But some jazz performers like Tord Gustavsen (piano) and producer Manfred Eicher create music that



needs no special invitation, but that is simply enjoyable for all. From the opening track “The Child Within,” the music is a calling to our first childhood glimpse of nature’s wondrous beauty. The powerful strokes of the piano in “Way In” unfold a surprising world of the unknown. From the plaintive, evocative but rhapsodic voice of Kristen Asbjornsen (reminiscent of Janis Joplin and Eva Cassidy) on “Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love,” to the majestic sounds of saxophonist Tore Brunborg (cheers to Charles Lloyd and Jan Garbarek) on “Spiral Song,” this whole album is a rebirth of the uplifting power of music to spark the visions of life’s mysteries and its infinite journeys. The title track, “Restored, Returned,” with its rhythmic pungency, illuminated by the gentle, compelling sense of vocal purpose from Ms. Asbjornsen, inflamed by the fiery, soulful saxophone of Mr. Brunborg along with the deeply reflective and pantheistically charged Mr. Gustavsen on the piano, represents one of the album’s finest achievements. Everywhere on this album the performances (“Left Over Lullaby No. 1/0, Stand By the Window,” “You Crooked Heart,” and “The Gaze”) are persuasive: crisp, precise, brilliantly and elegantly articulated, rhythmically spruce and invariably well tuned, and the ensemble’s carefully colored punctuation of the architecture of the whole is telling and dramatic. The recording is deserving of the highest commendation.

Place To Be •••

Hiromi, Telarc

Hiromi is a charismatic pianist with her delicacy of feeling and a velvety, luminous timbre that cajoles the ear, as does her ability to paint spacious landscapes from the unconscious, allowing one’s mind to dwell on pleasant scenes and images in

real time. Her enduring gift of forging rhythms and remolding phrases is consistently persuasive and imaginative, a point of reference for most of her albums that I have heard. And her latest, Place To Be, is about as

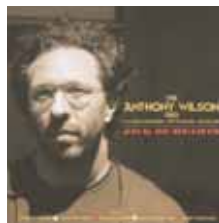


persuasive as you can get. There is a morning glow that sweeps slowly and peacefully in one’s mind from the vividly detailed and sharply etched performances like “Sicilian Blue,” “Somewhere” and “Place To Be.” This is the kind of music that demands a transcendental technique and a burning poetic commitment, a magical amalgam achieved with drama and finesse. Elsewhere there are predominantly lyrical and passionate pieces like “Island Azores” and “Viva! Vegas: Daytime Las Vegas,” all very entertaining and elegant.

Jack Of Hearts •••

The Anthony Wilson Trio, Groove Note Records

Most jazz trios face the daunting prospects of trying to present full-bodied performances even though they lack the ability to create the space for



innovative and full-blown compositions that call for saxophones and trumpets. Of course, there are exceptions. Nevertheless, the latest album from the Anthony Wilson Trio is no exception with no underlying pretense. No surprises here but still refreshingly enjoyable with some notable pieces like “Hawkeyes” (Coleman Hawkins), “Carnegie Blues,” “Zweet Zursday” (Duke Ellington), “Orange Crate Art,” “Harajuku” and “Homecoming.”

Starbound •••

Robin Verheyen, Pirouet Records

This is the kind of jazz music that is a model of how to balance emotional restraint and expressive warmth, and the performance does it justice. There is an evident delight in the way all of the musicians deployed their resources,

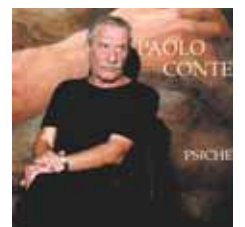


constantly registering the changes on traditional jazz formulas to produce a richness of ideas and extraordinary variety of colours and emotions on pieces like “The Flight of the Eagle,” “Lamenting,” and “Waves.” On “Long Island City” the music is much like city living with its hustle and bustle and seems to grow with the music itself. In the end, though, the songs that stretches the imagination in their creative empathy and a solitude sensed at the heart of a tingling, sentient world are “Narcis,” “Tree Line,” and “I Wish I Knew.” Featured musicians include Robin Verheyen (soprano and tenor saxophone), Bill Carrothers (piano), Nicolas Thys (bass), and Dré Pallemmaerts (drums). The recording has splendid presence and space.

Psiche •••

Paolo Conte, Platinum/Universal Records

Psiche is Paolo Conte’s latest release and for lovers of Italian romantic music, grab this one with a bottle of your favorite Italian wine, a loved one, and then let nature do the rest. But, first things first. Here is what you should know about the man. Mr. Conte, now in his 70s is an Italian singer, pianist, composer notable for his grainy, resonant voice, his colorful and dreamy compositions (evocative of Italian and Mediterranean sounds, as well as of jazz music, South American atmospheres and of French-language singers like Jacques Brel and Georges Brassens) and his wistful, sometimes melancholic lyrics. My favorites include “Psiche,” “Il Quadrato E Il Cerchio,” “Bella Di Giorno,” “Omicron,” “Coup De Theatre,” and “Berlino.” Other musicians featured are Massimo Pitzianti (piano), Jino Touche (guitar), Claudio Chiara (sax), Loca Velotti (clarinet, tenor sax), Piergiorgio Rosso (violin) and vocalist Emma Shapplin (vocals in “Coup De Theatre”).



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