



Catch The Groove: Live At The Penthouse 1963-1967

Cal Tjader (Jazz Detective/Elemental Music)
Huracán
Cal Tjader (Liberation Hall)
by Ken Dryden

Over four decades since Cal Tjader's death in 1982 (this month marks his 42-year death anniversary), his legacy deserves further consideration. The late vibraphonist and bandleader was so closely associated with Latin jazz that fans commonly have overlooked the acoustic jazz he continued to play well into the late '60s.

The rewarding two-disc set, *Catch The Groove*, documents previously unissued performances from six different engagements played at Jazz at the Penthouse in Seattle between 1963-67. The earliest show features Tjader with Clare Fischer (piano), Fred Schreiber (bass) and Johnny Rae (drums), with Bill Fitch (percussion) added for the Latin arrangements. A swinging treatment of "Take The 'A' Train" is a nice surprise, as is his extended exploration of Dave Brubeck's "In Your Own Sweet Way", sharing the solo space with Fischer. The Latin vibe begins with a breezy rendition of Jobim's "Manhã de Carnaval" and continues with Fitch's lively Afro-Cuban work "Insight" (which

unfortunately fades out).

The second band features Lonnie Hewitt (piano), Terry Hilliard (bass) and Rae (drums), with Armando Peraza (percussion). Claus Ogerman's works have often been ponderous, but Tjader's driving approach to "Sunset Boulevard" is an ear opener, as is the lyrical, whispering arrangement of the standard "Here's That Rainy Day". Peraza is added on Hewitt's engaging "Pantano" and Tjader's gently swaying "Leyte" conjures images of a gorgeous beach sunset. The third show includes a leisurely exploration of "On Green Dolphin Street" and showcases the vibraphonist's lyrical side, while Peraza's effusive "Maramoor Mambo" would get any audience on its feet. Tjader's band for the next two shows includes Al Zulaica (piano), Monk Montgomery (bass), Carl Burnett (drums) and Peraza (percussion). The lush treatment of "The Shadow of Your Smile" is a highlight, as is the unusual choice of Milt Jackson's "Bags' Groove". Peraza kicks into high gear for "Mambo Inn" and Ray Bryant's "Cuban Fantasy". The last set has yet another surprise, an arco introduction by bassist Stan Gilbert on Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life", not a typical song expected from Tjader. The extensive liner notes, vintage photos and excellent audio restoration of the time-worn tapes all add to the value of this historic release.

Tjader's *Huracán* was initially made as a direct-to-disc LP for Crystal Clear when it was first issued in 1976, which required an entire album side to be recorded in one take. Tjader's bands always came prepared to play and this session is no exception, though this has an atypical makeup for the vibraphonist: between nine and a dozen

instrumentalists all on the date, instead of being overdubbed later (which was often done when he recorded for Verve). Tjader's groups also tended to be rhythmically focused, so having the bonus of two reeds, three brass and a guitarist changes the dynamic considerably. The band includes Gary Foster (alto, flute), Kurt McGettrick (baritone), Frank Rosolino (trombone), Alex Rodriguez and Ronald King (trumpets), Clare Fischer (electric piano), Rick Zunigar (guitar), Robb Fisher (electric bass), Poncho Sanchez (congas), Willie Bobo (timbales) and Victor Pantoja (bongos, cowbell). The leader's solos are at a consistently high level, while the brass and reeds make his band seem much larger, such as in the rapid fire "Ritmo Caliente", with its particularly heated solos by Tjader and Zunigar (though it is the rhythm section that gives this piece its high energy). Fischer's easygoing "Desposado" is a feature for Foster (on flute) and the vibraphonist. The pianist additionally contributed "Funquiado" (which may have benefited from a faster tempo), the catchy dance number "Bachi" (built around a repeated riff and the flute of Foster) and the Afro-Cuban title track, which takes time to get untracked from the established groove until the entrance of Rosolino's show-stopping, vocal-like trombone (though McGettrick's squealing baritone proves distracting). The relaxed setting of Osvaldo Farras' "Tres Palabras" features a reflective solo from the pianist, which oddly enough is his only one on the recording.

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