



Beautiful!

Charles McPherson (Xanadu-Elemental Music)
by Duck Baker

Charles McPherson's career got off to a fast start. He was just 20 when he moved from Detroit to New York in 1959 and within a year he was working with bassist Charles Mingus. That association would last until 1972 and it is natural that it will always be the one for which the alto saxophonist is best known. Even at that early stage, McPherson's adherence to the gospel of Charlie Parker made him a bit of a throwback and he has remained a bebopper at heart throughout his career. But that is not to say that he was ever a mere imitator. McPherson may have spoken the language Bird defined, but he had his own story to tell.

During the '60s McPherson made six Prestige records for producer Don Schlitten and when the latter got the Xanadu label up and running in 1975, it didn't take long for the two men to reunite. *Beautiful* was the first of four records McPherson made for Xanadu and is a solid outing guaranteed to please anyone who likes straightahead modern jazz. The rhythm section of Duke Jordan, Sam Jones and Leroy Williams is superb and McPherson relishes the opportunity to showcase his rich tone on a program of standards. An early debt to Johnny Hodges, possibly filtered through Sonny Criss, is apparent, but the point is not the influences but what our protagonist does with them, which is to turn in confident improvisations full of nicely turned ideas. McPherson is the kind of player that people overlook because one must really tune in to hear how engaged he is, always finding a subtle way to punctuate or alter a phrase.

The CD concludes with a bonus track that didn't appear on the original LP, a trio version of "All God's Chillun Got Rhythm", confirming the importance of Jordan to the proceedings. Every note and every gesture seems perfect, delivered with elegant grace and a minimum of fuss. It must have been a treat for McPherson to work with the pianist who added so much to so many of his idol's classic records.

For more information, visit elemental-music.com. McPherson is at Jazz Standard Mar. 1st-3rd with George Coleman. See Calendar.



Harlem Hieroglyphs
Jay Hoggard (JHVM)
by John Pietaro

This double-disc release by vibraphonist extraordinaire Jay Hoggard stands as a salute to Harlem's roots and culture. Stringing together original compositions and a few key covers offering an overview of the music's journey, Hoggard presents selections of what was once commonly thought of as nightclub jazz and bits of funky R&B too. With this timewarp, you'd almost think New York City rents were affordable again.

But *Harlem Hieroglyphs* is far from a museum piece.

Hoggard speaks with pride of this one-time Lenape village of (as he reminds us in the liner notes) Manna Hatta island. The music within swings and sits comfortably in the canon, with gorgeously recorded vibraphone sharing the frontline with the alto and soprano saxophones of the much-lauded Gary Bartz.

The album opens with Frank Loesser's "If I Were a Bell", which Hoggard states was important to him symbolically, considering his ax. Played in a Sunday brunch feel, as opposed to other selections that carry on well past midnight, this is the kind of standard one still hears echoing through 125th Street—as well as 7th Avenue South. No matter the lateness of the hour, it is an excellent example of the heritage of our city's jazz tradition: small-group swing themes, progressive strains and some delightfully boppish heads. "Sonic Hieroglyphs" exemplifies the latter, with the leader's runs up and down the bars feeling like the ascension of Milt Jackson. At several points, his melodic duels with Bartz are reminiscent of the classic *Bags and Trane* album (another example is "Airegin", which contains melodic statements of considerable length and rapidity). And Hoggard also manages to conjure Lionel Hampton and perhaps Red Norvo at other points; his lack of vibrato, until certain special moments, speaks to the latter connection.

Throughout, the rhythm section is exemplary: pianist/organ player James Weidman (replaced by Nat Adderley, Jr on six of the cuts), bassist Belden Bullock and drummer Yoron Israel are integral components in top form. The closing cut, "Disposable Consumption" (who couldn't love that title?), is a killer, seemingly twisting cool school into a complex suite that leaves one awaiting another section by the time the disc ends.

For more information, visit jayhoggard.com. Hoggard is at Roulette Mar. 2nd with Taylor Ho Bynum. See Calendar.



Latin American Songbook
Edward Simon (Sunnyside)
by Joel Roberts

Veteran pianist Edward Simon's latest release is a love letter to the music of his childhood. Growing up in Venezuela, Simon was exposed to a wide spectrum of music from across South America, as well as the Caribbean, all of which made an indelible impression on the young artist, informing the musician he is to this day.

The 47-year-old Simon, who has played in the past with the likes of Greg Osby, Bobby Watson, Terence Blanchard and the SFJAZZ Collective, fluidly melds a modern jazz sensibility with a deep affection for traditional folk music. The new album is a bookend in some ways to Simon's 2014 release *Venezuelan Suite*, expanding the focus from just his homeland to the entire continent and beyond. The seven songs Simon covers are classic compositions representing six different countries and multiple styles, including Brazilian Bossa nova, Argentinean Tango and Cuban Bolero, as well as tunes from Puerto Rico, Chile and his native land.

Simon leads his long-standing trio of bassist Joe Martin and drummer Adam Cruz through the diverse set with a warm, lyrical and easily appealing piano style. He plays with drama and flair on Astor Piazzolla's passionate "Libertango" and with a subtle mastery on the gorgeous Cuban ballad "En la Orilla del Mundo". Other highlights include the energetic

group workout on Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Chega de Saudade", featuring fine solo turns from Martin and Cruz, and the emotional reading of "Volver", a tango that Simon's father used to sing.

Simon and his sympathetic partners do an exemplary job throughout the album of putting a contemporary, personal spin on classic material, making the case for these tunes from the Latin American Songbook to be played as standards by all jazz artists.

For more information, visit sunnysiderecords.com. Simon is at National Sawdust Mar. 2nd as part of a tribute to Mercedes Sosa. See Calendar.

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