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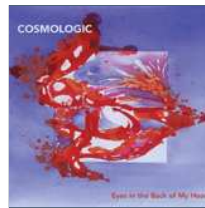
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Eyes in the Back of My Head
Cosmologic | Cuneiform Records (2008)

By Troy Collins

Discuss



In today's world of all-star studio sessions and endless collaborative side-projects, longstanding working bands are growing increasingly uncommon. Cosmologic is a splendid example of such a rarefied entity. Honing their tightly knit sound for almost a decade, the San Diego based acoustic quartet was formed in 1999 by tenor saxophonist Jason Robinson, trombonist Michael Dessen, bassist Scott Walton and drummer Nathan Hubbard, the same line-up featured today. Preceded by three self-released albums, their debut for Cuneiform Records, *Eyes in The Back of My Head* is their first record to enjoy wide distribution.

Though Cosmologic shares aesthetic similarities with adventurous contemporaries like Tim Berne and Ken Vandermark, they also look to the past for inspiration. The euphonious ardor of "Face in the Crowd" invokes late period Coltrane with a miasma of fervent lyricism while the title track undulates with a loping percussive lilt, channeling the menacing theatricality of classic Archie Shepp.

The two horn front line exudes the telepathic empathy enjoyed by such famous pairs as Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry or Steve Lacy and Roswell Rudd. Jason Robinson's muscular phrasing unveils a stout tone informed by the fiery tenors of the late sixties New Thing. The flutter tongue trills and multiphonic smears of "Code View" embody the searching quality of Pharoah Sanders in his prime, while the plangent glisses of "Dreams of an Alternate Future/Remembering the Past" convey the emotional resonance of Coltrane. Michael Dessen is an effusive and lyrical player with a predilection for mutes; his plunger muted soliloquy on "Face in the Crowd" is humorously reminiscent of the garrulous trombone solos featured in the *Peanuts* cartoons.

The rhythm section shares rhythmic, melodic and harmonic duties with the horns. Scott Walton's sinewy tone on upright is bolstered by robust arco playing; his bowed introduction to the epic "Dreams of an Alternate Future/Remembering the Past" is hypnotically intense. A tuneful percussionist in the Ed Blackwell mode, Nathan Hubbard's colorful palette fuels a kaleidoscopic battery on the title track that summons a web of harmonious accents and ebullient momentum.

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Gracefully modulating from serene introspection to contrapuntal vigor, the quartet transitions seamlessly from open-ended explorations to taut ensemble charts, revealing a knowing maturity enhanced by years of experience. As a true collective, individually authored tunes are cooperatively finalized in practice sessions that lend a natural, organic sensibility to their intricate arrangements. Demonstrating an impressive dynamic range, they delve into pneumatic funk ("The Rumpus"), coiling free-bop ("Theme for Darfur") and ethereal balladry ("The Apex is the Whole") with equal passion.

Eyes in the Back of My Head is a richly rewarding statement from a group whose time for greater exposure is long overdue. Accessible yet forward thinking, this is contemporary West Coast jazz at its most heartfelt and adventurous.

[Cosmologic at All About Jazz.](#)
Visit [Cosmologic](#) on the web.

Track listing: The Rumpus; Eyes in the Back of My Head; Dreams of an Alternate Future/Remembering the Past; Face in the Crowd; Code View; Theme for Darfur; The Apex is the Whole; We Kiss in a Shadow on the Other Side of This.

Personnel: Jason Robinson: tenor saxophone; Michael Dessen: trombone; Scott Walton: bass; Nathan Hubbard: drums.

Style: [Modern Jazz](#)
Published: July 04, 2008

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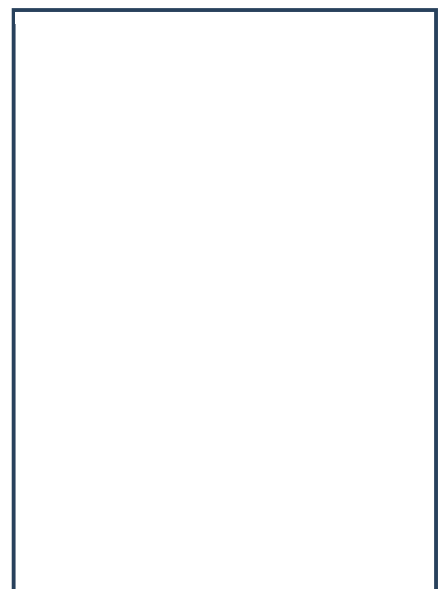
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