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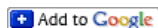
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Gonzalo Rubalcaba - Solos: The Jazz Sessions

[Original Sin Films](#) // Unrated // March 23, 2010

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Review by [Kurt Dahlke](#) | posted November 11, 2010 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

Gonzalo Rubalcaba - Solos: The Jazz Sessions:

Gorgeous and sensitive, this edition of *Solos: The Jazz Sessions* might seem a bit disingenuous, even antithetical to many notions of jazz, simply due to the effortless, slick way in which it's put together. Though seemingly conflicted in part for a document of jazz, this disk in the end serves up a truly tasty assortment, almost a full hour of fantastic music and sumptuous visuals. I suppose it's up to you, after reading this, to decide if you want your jazz delivered to the table in such fashion.

As told in a short series of brief interview clips dispersed throughout the music, Rubalcaba's passion for, and lifetime love of music is evident. The Cuban-born musician clearly has an affinity for those 'little black dots' we call sheet-music, as demonstrated with this handful of wide-ranging compositions. Sitting in a gothic cathedral transformed into a soundstage, Rubalcaba's performance is captured by multiple HD cameras, with sensuous lighting as an accompaniment. It's truly a fantastic looking and sounding show.

Of course what is most fantastic is Rubalcaba's style and performance itself, one filled with passion and spontaneity that forces its way through a lushly sedate atmosphere. To this reviewer's tastes and assumptions, jazz music - no matter its temperament - is about that fleeting flash of inspiration as much as it is about polish. With camera angles ranging from high in the rafters to practically underneath the bench, and with razor-sharp edits mixing it all together, I'm hard-pressed to believe this wasn't filmed with multiple takes and performances. In fact *Solos* series creator Daniel K. Berman proves me wrong, indicating that only four (but looking like many more) HD cameras were deployed simultaneously to capture Rubalcaba's performance. The overall effect of such a high level of polish indicates a huge level of respect for the genre, though depending on your proclivities it may mute somewhat the wonder great jazz performances possess, while creating a feeling of gentility and restraint.

Nonetheless, Rubalcaba's expressiveness, sensitivity to the music, and passion, all shine through. It's true that much Rubalcaba plays is on the gentle side, occasionally set off by metronomic two-tone ostinatos creating hypnotic effects, yet you can often read Rubalcaba's force on his face. He mouths his notes visibly, he even quietly sings along to some of these solos like a hip Peter Frampton on his guitar's talk-box. Most telling, it's in his face, ranging in expression from humble and penitent to nearly overcome with grief. Though I'm no jazz aficionado, I know what I like, and I love what I've heard here from Rubalcaba, which is playful, whip-smart, intense and lyrical.

So maybe this grand showcase seems to diffuse fire or improvisation, frankly it's more of the type for showcasing Celine Dion, and at just about an hour running time with its sole extra, it's slight for a DVD release. However, there's no faulting the quality and finish, this is a fantastic looking and sounding program. Depending on your jazz knowledge and love of Rubalcaba, you'll have to decide if this sort-of musical travelogue is something that will get you swaying, or find you looking for a live performance on vinyl or in person.

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The DVD

Video:

Presented in 16 X 9 Widescreen, this program really does look lush. Colors are rich and saturated, while dark corners of the set are suitably inky. The image is crisp, sharp and clear, with no evidence of compression artifacts or authoring difficulties.

Sound:

Presented in Digital Stereo Audio, this disk sounds as good as it looks. Though not flashy in a 7.1 way, the sound is solid, distortion-free, and possesses a wide dynamic range. Music fans will take great delight in this audio presentation.

Extras:

A performance by **Lee Konitz** from another disk in this series, at about eight minutes in length, is the sole extra.

Final Thoughts:

Gonzalo Rubalcaba, a superstar among jazz pianists, gets the royal treatment on this hour-long disk. His precise performance is in holding with the precise nature of this presentation; filmed with multiple HD cameras on a beautiful location, with sweet lighting and sharp edits. Yet this might not be your preferred way to consume jazz, which some feel trades on spontaneity and improvisation as much as it does on technical skill. Hardcore fans will probably want this in their collections, though for most it might simply represent a great introduction to the musician, and when they **Rent It**, they'll find out more.

- Kurt Dahlke

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