

Rob Ryndak

A Reason to Smile

(Pacific Coast Jazz)

Don't worry. Be happy. That's the message pianist Rob Ryndak wants you to take home with you after enjoying his vacation-filled garden of smooth delights. He pulls from bossa nova, Caribbean dance, Ghanaian akom, R&B and smooth jazz to put glowing embers to rest. You'll want to sit back in some comfortable place far away from the hyperactive world, forget about working, smile, and enjoy his program of 10 original songs. Ryndak's intimate ensembles feature empathic artists such as gifted trumpeter/flugelhornist Joe Saia, smooth jazz saxophonist Steve Wunder, flutist Greg Fishman, electric bassist Kal Bergendahl and others, who help provide daydream scenarios for relaxed comfort.

The composer dedicates several of his songs to family members and friends; that feeling comes through his music with grace and nurturing. "Lea's Joy" features conguero Ruben Alvarez in an African romp. "Clare's Arrival" saunters delicately over rolling waves of flute and flugelhorn melodies while congas provide the meat and potatoes for the pianist's mild venture. "Blues for Emily" features the leader's soulful piano in a comfortable romp that stands out as the session's high point. Here, trumpeter Saia struts his stuff with authority, Wunder wails on tenor with juke joint emphasis, Sasha Brusin lifts the roof with a wham-bam flurry of fingers, electric bassist John Falstrom thunders accordingly with a vibrant edge, and the rest of the band follows suit. The mood fits. Elsewhere, Saia's flugelhorn and Brusin's guitar give "Larimar" a buoyant texture that proves uplifting. Ryndak's session aims for the smooth side of jazz, giving his audience plenty of reasons to smile.

Jim Santella