

John Bailey Plugs Into “Real Time”

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IN REAL TIME / BAILEY: Rhapsody. My Man Louis! Triplicity. Lovely Planet. Blues for Ella. Stepping Up. Children's Waltz. NASCIMENTO: Morro Velho.* GIL: Ensaio Geral / John Bailey, tpt/fl-hn; Stacy Dillard, t-sax/s-sax; John Hart, gtr; Cameron Brown, bs; Victor Lewis, dm/cymb; *Janet Axelrod, fl; *Leo Grinhauz, cel / Summit DCD 720

Sometimes, a return to good old-fashioned, basic jazz is a good thing. I've heard so many modern-day jazz albums that try to be something other than jazz—mostly soft, mooshy lounge music, other

times funky fusion—that listening to a band like this one in tunes that just take off and say something through strong, inventive solos can be a breath of fresh air.

And that is what you get on this album by trumpeter-writer John Bailey. Nothing pretentious. No music that tries to baffle the listener with off-kilter rhythms and confusing, sometimes confused, musical lines. *Rhapsody* is a good old-fashioned swinger, while *My Man Louis!* is an old-fashioned sort of Blue Note funky blues tune. After the opening themes, the soloists come in and have their say. They hold your attention by just playing good, solid, musical lines that aren't trying to out-weird Pharaoh Sanders. It's music that makes you smile and picks up your spirits. And I must give very high marks to drummer Victor Lewis for knowing just how much to play, providing a solid backdrop (and occasional fancy licks and solos) without overstepping and trying to crush the ensemble.

It makes sense that Bailey was a member of the Buddy Rich Big Band at age 18 (which was 1984...I just missed hearing him, having heard the Rich band twice, once in 1969 and again in 1976), since he has a solid jazz concept. In *Triplicity*, he also has a few tricks up his sleeve, alternating a solid, swinging 4 with passages in 3. And thank goodness, his guitarist, John Hart, is also a JAZZ musician. He's not trying to play rock on his

instrument. He's a really exciting player in the Barney Kessel-Charlie Byrd mold, which delighted me no end.

Bailey is the kind of trumpeter who clearly understands the old maxim that "less is more." He definitely has the chops to play technically dazzling solos if he chose to, but he understands that keeping to basics and occasionally adding a little space to his playing makes more of an impact. And he *says* something on his instrument; his solos are really meaty and go somewhere. Likewise, saxist Stacy Dillard also makes a fine impact, often picking up on the leader's last statement for his own opening figures. Yes, he occasionally throws in some double-time licks and a few buzzed notes, but they're tasteful. He has structure in his playing. *Lovely Planet* opens with a really fine bass solo by Cameron Brown that belies the old jungle drum joke. ("Drums must never stop!" "Why not?" "Bass solo!"), leading into a gorgeous, lyrical tune played by the leader with phenomenal breath control and an outstanding tone. The saxophone doubles him in thirds for the second chorus. *Blues for Ella* is an uptempo romp, opening with Hart's guitar backed by bass and drums before moving into the quirky, broken theme, nicely constructed in a way that allows for maximum improvisation when the solos arrive.

In Milton Nascimento's *Morro Velho*, Bailey is joined only by bass and guitar in addition to his wife, flautist Janet Axelrod, and cellist Leo

Grinhauz in an arrangement that is surprisingly tasteful. I use that term because far too many such arrangements nowadays tend to overdo the mush while distancing the music from jazz, but Bailey has a fine ear and knows how to strike a good balance with the jazz material. He even has Grinhauz' cello play opposing lines against his own trumpet. This is surely one of the real gems on this album, and ends on an unresolved chord. We return to straightahead jazz with the uptempo *Stepping Up*, a real old-fashioned hard bop tune in which the solos dominate, and rightly so. The *Children's Waltz* is also a good composition, not another puerile-sounding tune made to please young people; Brown takes another outstanding solo on this one, as does Dillard, this time on soprano sax. Gil's *Ensaio geral* is played in a nice bossa nova tempo, a perfect summertime piece, with taste and invention by the band. It's a fine rideout to an excellent album.

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