



Pathways

Michael Rodriguez (Rodbrosmusic)
by Dan Bilawsky

A confluence of influences, this release from trumpeter Michael Rodriguez taps into his experiences working with jazz icons. Sharing a frontline with tenor saxophonist John Ellis and engaging a stellar rhythm section of pianist Gary Versace, bassist Joe Martin and drummer Obed Calvaire, he delivers an arresting program focused on originals speaking to travels with legends and lessons learned along the way.

Opening on the title track, Rodriguez uses both driven straight-time and seriously swinging space to genuflect to the giants of the music. He then focuses on specific artists who have figured into his journey: “In Due Time”, gliding along gracefully, nods to Kenny Barron (and Rodriguez’ decade-long tenure in the pianist’s quintet); sinuous “Just in Case”, supported by seductive grooves and exiting with wonderfully twined lines, honors Gonzalo Rubalcaba, another pianist who employed the trumpeter and left a strong impression; and literal centerpiece “Crossroads”, recognizes pianist Chick Corea and bandleader Maria Schneider in its development. Rodriguez, having written the piece after recording with Corea’s Spanish Heart Band in 2019 and absorbing the colorful melodies and shapes in Schneider’s art as a member of her orchestra, intentionally and lovingly infused the essence of both singular visionaries into this work.

The last of Rodriguez’ composition, “Solid Ground”, calls to Corea in more overt fashion, accentuating a playful energy that is absolutely magnetic. Things come to a close with different yet complementary covers: guitarist Bill Frisell’s “Throughout”, in tribute to Charlie Haden and serving as a reflection on Rodriguez’ time with the bassist’s Liberation Music Orchestra; and Richard Rodgers-Lorenz Hart classic “Spring is Here”, opening on Rodriguez all by his lonesome, patiently bringing each member into the picture and settling into a full-band flow to mark the dawn of a new season of creativity. Showing respect for those who have welcomed him and opened doors to new possibilities, Rodriguez demonstrates mastery and majesty all his own.

For more information, visit rodbrosmusic.com. Rodriguez is at The Jazz Gallery Nov. 5th with Remy Le Boeuf. See Calendar.



Silver Lining Suite
Hiromi (Telarc)
by Tom Greenland

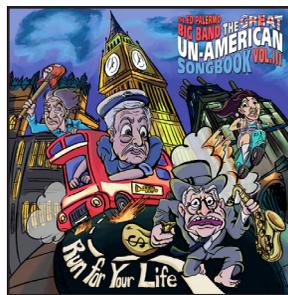
Silver Lining Suite is Japanese pianist Hiromi’s 12th studio project, inspired in part by months of separation from bandmates and audiences, in part by a desire to write for and play with a classical string quartet. Known for her unique style—a meshing of jazz, classical and pop/rock influences delivered with expressive virtuosity—Hiromi here uses the string section in innovative ways: sometimes it sounds like

a Romantic-era classical quartet employing tonal harmonies with chromatic embellishments; other times like programmatic film scoring; still others like the unisons, soli and tutti germane to jazz big band charts. In places cellist Wataru Mukai plucks walking ‘bass’-lines or bows guitar-like riffs. On the final track violinists Tatsuo Nishie and Sohei Birmann and violist Meguna Naka trade solos, imitating the style of a Roma dance. The four movements of the suite—“Isolation”, “The Unknown”, “Drifters” and “Fortitude”—are all set in minor keys, often favoring 6/8 rhythms at fast tempos, though the third begins with a five-beat Brahms-esque chorale. The fifth track, “Uncertainty”, is a solo rumination that lingers in the high register.

Hiromi’s astounding technique could come off as grandstanding—for example, in the fourth movement she holds a high right-hand trilling figure while simultaneously moving a left-hand bass part, soloing in the midrange, and some of her runs are so fast it is hard to hear the separate notes—but even in her most precipitous moments she seems to be working with an idea, expressively pulling on the time, lacing her long lines with internal ornaments and figures. Without laying back in the traditional jazz sense, she nevertheless creates her own brand of swing through rhythmic mobility. Some of her finest playing is heard on “Someday”, “Jumpstart” and “11:49PM” where, à la Oscar Peterson, she sequences motives into long, well-articulated passages peppered with bluesy inserts.

If the album crackles and sparks, Hiromi’s early set (Oct. 7th), the first of four she would play at Times Square’s Sony Hall, positively exploded. She covered all but one piece from the album, opening with “Someday”, followed by the suite, then “11:49PM”, “Jumpstart” and “Ribera Del Duero” for an encore. The string section hired for the two-night stand—violinists Curtis Stewart and Fung Chern Hwei, violist Nick Revel and cellist Hamilton Berry—did a fine job with the inventive arrangements, nailing the long fast tricky unison passages, milking the rich choral section, improvising adeptly on the finale. Hiromi, always an energetic presence, seemed especially charged up to be back on stage at last, grinning directly into the crowd as she developed an intricate motive, stomping her gold lamé, pom-pom-laced hi-top sneakers in time to the beat, at one point jumping up to dance while the strings played, clapping a 6/8 clave pattern to accompany them. At times she sounded like a conguero, using rapid alternating hand combinations to achieve masterful syncopation, at others she held down gnarly left-hand ostinatos while her right hand sped up and down the keyboard for long stretches, only to stop suddenly with millisecond precision. But the audience wasn’t just shaking their heads or dropping their jawbones in amazement: they were smiling at Hiromi’s sheer cleverness and contagious enthusiasm, sharing her joy in the act of music-making.

For more information, visit concord.com/labels/telarc



The Great Un-American Songbook, Vol. III
Ed Palermo Big Band (Skycat)
by Ken Dryden

Ed Palermo has been leading his big band since the mid ‘90s and his frequent inspiration has been the compositions of Frank Zappa. Like him, Palermo enjoys creating medleys, occasionally throwing in mashups of several other songs into the mix while

segueing directly from one track to the next. He also has a group of loyal musicians, a few of whom are charter members while others have long tenure and obviously enjoy Palermo’s madcap yet swinging arrangements.

While the band’s latest CD is primarily focused on hits by British rock bands, Palermo manages to sneak in some Zappa, sometimes as a part of a medley and other times inserted in unexpected places. Who else would score a medley of The Beatles’ “Within You Without You” with The Hollies’ “Stop Stop Stop”, only to include quotes of Zappa works like “Little House I Used To Live In” and “G-Spot Tornado”? The music of Traffic, Thunderclap Newman, Jethro Tull and Procol Harum are also subjected to Palermo’s experimentation. The blending of The Beatles’ “Come Together” and Zappa’s “Chunga’s Revenge” is sidesplitting, especially with yet another cameo of “G-Spot Tornado”. “Let’s Move To Cleveland” and The Beatles’ “Fixing A Hole” is more mashup than medley, with Zappa dominating the musical landscape and violinist Kate Jacoby’s spicy violin prominently featured.

The controlled insanity concludes with a hilarious mashup of The Moody Blues’ “Nights In White Satin” utilizing Zappa’s “Moggio” as a backing theme, showcasing keyboardist Ted Kooshian and a sincere vocal by Bruce McDaniel (who also arranged the introduction), before slowing the tempo to parody the original closing narration with several biting asides by Michael James. Palermo fans will also enjoy the band caricatures in the artwork, with references to the famous Beatles LP *Abbey Road*.

For more information, visit palmomobigband.com. Palermo is at Iridium Nov. 22nd. See Calendar.

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