



After Hours ... Jamie Williams, Jamie Williams Music

Jamie Williams debut album, *After Hours*, is a collection of R&B, funk, contemporary jazz and pop instrumentals, with special guest, Jennifer Hudson of "Dreamgirls" performing a version of Stevie Wonder's "Overjoyed." Mr. Williams wrote seven songs for *After Hours* and collaborated with Veit Renn (InSync, Backstreet Boys) on another, the breezy, samba-seasoned "Tropica." The album opens with the edgy jazz-hip-hop mélange "2 Cool." "Better Than Life" is a romantic pop ballad that Mr. Williams wrote for his wife, Ana. "Shut Up & Dance" mixes an energizing dance groove, lilting pop melodies and cool jazz nuances. The soulful title track was inspired by Mr. Williams' after-hours experiences playing nightclubs. The head-bobbing, booty-shakin' "Can U Feel It?" is a sweaty R&B groove equipped with a potent, feel-good pop hook. "Over The Top" is an aggressive contemporary jazz track with horns a-blazin' that goes for the kill right from the first note. "Calculated Risk" is a sultry mid-tempo soul-jazz cut. Ms. Hudson delivers a show-stopping vocal on "Overjoyed," while Mr. Williams' sax wonderfully accentuates her performance. Guitarist Bradley Catron wrote the funky, horn section-powered "S.O.S." jam.

En Route ... Four80East, Native Land Music

This latest release from the Toronto-based Four80East is mixture of robust dance vibes, improvisational straight-ahead jazz, and funky urban sensualities. The album opens with a sweet and bluesy "Five By Five," a funky, R&B style "Noodle Soup," followed by a vibrant and moody "The Drop," which blends some avant-garde jazz guitar and trippy sound effects over a sensual groove — at best, big and open but trenchant and analytically clear. "Double Down" takes a plugged in, postmodern view of the traditional jazz quartet, with cool and chaotic high hat and drums mixing with Jon Stewart's smoky tenor. Mr. Stewart also adds a punchy solo to the otherwise dark toned, low key, soul-influenced "Been Too Long." "Closer" serves as a late night seduction song, with Devine Brown's sexy wordless vocals drifting over dreamy synth textures. The

groove picks up on the next tracks, the joyfully energetic jazz-pop fusion flavored title track and spacey jazz electronica gem "51 Division," before the chill takes over again on "Don't Look Back" (with Mr. DeBoer's crisp guitar lines circling Bryden Baird's silky trumpet tones) and the haunting, shadowy "Easy Come, Easy Go." The album ends with the bouncy and expansive, Eastern flavored electric guitar driven electric jazz number, "Waterline."

What's Up? The Very Tall Band ... Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown, Milt Jackson, Telarc

It is clear from the opening of this set that the performers were on good form at this 1998 gathering in New York City at the Blue Note. Three great jazz legends, Oscar Peterson (piano), Ray Brown (bass), and Milt Jackson (vibe), met, and the music that emerged was as brilliant as it was spontane-

ous. Although the event produced an album, "The Very Tall Band," there was plenty of material from the three-night gig that didn't make the final cut. Elaine Martone, Telarc's executive vice president of production and producer of the original Very Tall Band release, recently uncovered seven additional tracks recorded at the Blue Note date. The result is "What's Up?," nearly 60 minutes of material from this historic 1998 performance.

The seven-song set opens with the rhythmic and upbeat "Squatty Roo," followed by an equally upbeat and lighthearted "Salt Peanuts," a piece that showcases Mr. Jackson's blurring dexterity on vibes. At this stage, the whole album springs along with fervor and finesse; the music has none of that unrehearsed feel that detracts from musicians having fun hanging out together. The album offers truly outstanding jazz, among the best to date and unquestionably in the Ray Brown class. The recording is

beautifully balanced and clear and refreshingly free of audience noise and applause. Sadly, two of these brilliant musicians have since died: Mr. Jackson died in 1999, barely a month after the release of "The Very Tall Band," and Mr. Brown died in 2002.

Reclaiming Independence ... Independence Jazz Reunion, Duncan Hill Records

This latest album from Independence Jazz Reunion marks their 50th year as a group — a milestone for six young friends from Philadelphia who started with a dream to play great jazz and to preserve the genius of the heart and soul of the music itself. And they did, both with their first album, *Rekindling the Dream*, and their latest, *Reclaiming Independence*. They followed this passion, grounded in their desire to be the best, and their ability to harness their creative energy with discipline, com-

mitment and knowledge from experience. They started with the question, "Why is jazz so important for us?" You have to listen and feel the music. Why is life so breathtaking for those who have seen its beauty? Is it the sunrise, or the simple unfolding of a day for us to bear witness? The music of Independence Reunion is pleasurable and spiritually uplifting. And to make it easy to get with their music, the group offers its own entertaining description of each song on the album. These, then, are performances of exceptional lucidity, virtuoso voltage and trenchancy, and all are excellently recorded.

The album begins with "Jumpin' With Symphony Sid," a driving sweet ensemble; "In a Sentimental Mood," a classic jazz standard with poignant sax solo; "If I Had You," a delightful Dixieland with instrumental solos; "Blue Monk," cool laid-back jazz; "But Not For Me," a free and easy swing with rousing scat vocal; "It's Easy To Remember," a refined, classy solo piano; "Louie Bellson," a comical voice and bass feature; "Mood Indigo," an intimate sax ballad; "I Found a New Baby," cooking Dixieland; "Customs," showcasing humorous Latin-jazz vocal; "Bleak and Blue," a relaxed Dixieland; "Autumn Leaves," an intricate, sophisticated solo piano; and "The Preacher," a dynamic, gospel swing. This delightful recording is a reminder of jazz's rich heritage and uniqueness. Here is playing which in its life-affirming sweep and opulence makes this group a rare treasure and, while their interpretations will not satisfy every listener on every occasion, they make an excellent case for bringing us good jazz, which bears the unmistakable stamp of greatness and is central to our understanding of jazz place in our contemporary musical life.

All CDs reviewed in this article are heard through Bowers & Wilkens 802D Speakers and ASW 4000 subwoofer, and Rotel Preamp 1070, amplifier 1092 and CD player 1072. For more information about this column, please email your questions to fagon@hillrag.com. ■

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