



The Uptown Shuffle
Vincent Herring (Smoke Sessions)
by Joel Roberts

Saxophonist Vincent Herring learned the ropes the old-fashioned way, by playing alongside some of the music’s masters. He was a member of Lionel Hampton’s big band in the early ‘80s and then served an extended apprenticeship with cornetist/trumpeter Nat Adderley, which was appropriate, since Herring’s alto sound is so strongly reminiscent of Nat’s brother Cannonball. He also studied with alto legend Phil Woods, recorded with trumpet icon Freddie Hubbard and played for many years with the great pianist Cedar Walton. A few decades later, Herring has firmly established himself as one of his generation’s masters, continuing the hardbop tradition pioneered by the likes of the Adderleys, Art Blakey, Horace Silver and others.

Though he’s had forays into funk and R&B with his group Earth Jazz, Herring’s latest CD finds him solidly in his wheelhouse, playing no-nonsense hard-swinging jazz. He’s joined by always-soulful pianist Cyrus Chestnut, in-demand drummer Joe Farnsworth and an appealing young bassist, Brandi Disterheft.

In this live date, recorded last year at Manhattan’s Smoke club, the group works through a set heavy on standards (“Tenderly”, “Polka Dots and Moonbeams”,

“Strike Up the Band”), along with a handful of originals, including Herring’s rousing opener, “Elation”, and the bluesy bebop title track, penned by Chestnut. The session closes with a stellar workout on Duke Pearson’s overlooked gem, “Big Bertha”, which has become a signature piece for the leader. The saxophonist impresses throughout with his powerful solos and warm ballad playing and he and Chestnut have a particularly sympathetic rapport.

Herring isn’t a trailblazer as much as an artist working within and extending an established genre, so don’t expect a lot of surprises from this lively straight-ahead outing. But what the album lacks in innovation, it makes up for in the energy and overall excellence of the musicians involved.

For more information, visit smokesessionsrecords.com. Herring is at Smoke Apr. 18th-19th. See Calendar.



Sotareño
Carolina Calvache (Sunnyside)
by Elliott Simon

Pianist Carolina Calvache leans on her nice touch, Colombian roots and some heavy bandmates, especially bassist Hans Glawischnig, for *Sotareño*. Intended as a reflective Colombian folk song, the title

cut opens the album and is rearranged into a modern jazz improvisation platform with guest drummer Antonio Sanchez. The band, especially saxophonist Jaleel Shaw, impresses but somewhat at the expense of the song’s intent. The tune is then recast closer to its original form as a solo piano piece to end the session. In between, Calvache presents melodic modern jazz with a rhythmical Latin undercurrent.

The blowing tunes with Shaw and trumpeter Michael Rodriguez are tight but formulaic and it is the more pensive cuts that are the gems. Calvache has a wonderfully expressive line with beautiful phrasing, perfect for the traditional beauty found in an emotional tune like “Melodia Triste”, combining with bass and saxophone for a delicately pensive portrait. “Stella” is a pretty trio piece that has Calvache, Glawischnig and drummer Ludwig Afonso engaging in delightful interplay. It is a peek at a format that suits Calvache exceedingly well. “Melancholia” is all the more plaintive and allows Calvache and Shaw to contemplate their personal blues from differing perspectives.

Glawischnig and Calvache are made for each other and the very pretty “Te Agradezco” is meant for the two of them. Calvache classically informs the melody and Glawischnig adds achingly beautiful coloration to turn the piece into a special thank you to one of Calvache’s mentors. “Monday” and “Too Soon” are ensemble pieces, within which Calvache takes a back seat, the latter featuring poignant trumpet and basslines inspired by the late trombonist Bob Brookmeyer. While Calvache occasionally tries to have this debut do too much, *Sotareño* is a well-structured first effort.

For more information, visit sunnysiderecords.com. This project is at Drom Apr. 15th. See Calendar.

