

THIS JUST IN
Brian McCarthy
Brian McCarthy Quintet
Self Produced

The state of Vermont is one of the most beautiful places in the USA. Although it only has three seasons, summer, fall and winter. There is no spring to speak of, the natives refer to it as Mud season). During any one of those seasons the scenic beauty is breathtaking. There is no place in the world that can compete with a Vermont autumn. One thing that Vermont does not have is a thriving jazz scene. Saxophonist Brian McCarthy was absent the day that announcement was made, because he plays and teaches jazz all over the state.

After earning both Bachelor and Masters degrees from William Patterson University, McCarthy came back to Vermont (I assume he is a native) to set up shop. Besides playing jazz primarily in the Burlington area, McCarthy is on the faculty of Saint Michael's College, the University of Vermont and Johnson State College.

All of the music on this recording is composed and arranged by McCarthy save *The Feeling of Jazz*, by Duke Ellington. The rhythm section met McCarthy and each other at William Patterson and came to Vermont to record the CD; they include Justin Kauflin, piano; Evan Gregor, bass; and Quinn Blandford, drums. McCarthy plays alto and tenor saxophones, and Ray Vega plays trumpet on four tracks.

The CD opener, *Mack Attack*, is a medium-up tempo swinger that harkens back to the Blue Note sounds of yesterday. Alto and trumpet play the melody in unison over mostly modal harmony, interspersed with hits from the rhythm section. McCarthy is in for the first solo, stating his case in an unapologetic fashion. His sound is dark with just enough edge, his technique is clean and his time solid. Vega and Kauflin follow with a chorus each before the return of the head. *Precipice*, a modal jazz waltz, is next up featuring alto and rhythm section. Here McCarthy uses just a bit of vibrato on the long lines of the melody and his solo to make it interesting; a nod of the head to the later recordings of John Coltrane. His solo is filled with fire as he and the rhythm section let the fur fly.

The Departure (Part One) and *The Arrival (Part Two)*, are two tunes that share the same basic minor mode harmonic structure and underlying rhythmic foundation, a medium-slow straight-eighth groove. *Part One* has alto and trumpet playing the long, melancholy melodic line, sometimes in unison, sometimes voiced or in counterpoint. After the statement of the melody, McCarthy follows bassist Gregor into the solo spotlight with a lyrical view on this seemingly sad state of affairs. *Part Two* uses a derivative of the background structure of *The Departure*, but uses the melodic minor to convey a more optimistic view. Here the theme is played by tenor and trumpet, and following Kauflin's piano, McCarthy's solo statement is more up beat than on the previous track. His sound on tenor is dark, brilliant and alive; his lines direct and animated making the listener feel a sense of well being about getting to the sought after destination.

The title tune is an up-tempo, straight-eighth modal tune that uses an ostinato line in bass and left hand piano, while the circular melody is played by unison alto and right hand piano. McCarthy solos over the intense rhythmic underpinning to great affect, keeping the momentum and energy created by the rhythm section going through his entire statement.

One more tune of interest is the previously mentioned *The Feeling of Jazz*, by Ellington. The tune is played in a two feel, with McCarthy once again paying homage to John Coltrane by

injecting *Giant Steps* changes into the turn-around of the last phrase. McCarthy is on alto once again and never loses sight of the melodic nature of the tune, letting his sound sing the melody and solo alike.

Brian McCarthy's abilities as a saxophonist and composer are worth investigating. With this recording he proves that you don't have to be from the "big city" to be a solid jazz musician. §

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Jim Snidero

Saviant Records (SCD 2127)

Jim Snidero's latest CD, *Stream of Consciousness*, contains seven new original compositions by Snidero, as performed by a newly formed group of talented musicians, including Paul Bollenback on guitar, Linda Oh on bass, and Rudy Royston on drums.

Snidero's reputation as a virtuoso saxophonist and respected bandleader has been established for some time now. Upon moving to New York City in 1981 after studying at the University of North Texas, Snidero launched his career as a sideman with various established jazz artists and groups, including Brother Jack McDuff, The Mingus Big Band, Frank Wess, Eddie Palmieri, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Maria Schneider, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Sting, drummers Steve Smith and Billy Higgins, as well as many others. As a bandleader, Snidero has always worked with some of the top jazz musicians, including Tom Harrell, Billy Hart, Mulgrew Miller, Kenny Kirkland, Benny Green, Louis Hayes, Jeff "Tain" Watts, Peter Washington, Eric Alexander, Kevin Hayes, Tim Hagans, Kenny Washington, Marvin "Smitty" Smith and Paul Bollenback, to name a few. Snidero is also very active in jazz education with his numerous educational jazz texts and has recently started an innovative on-line series of jazz courses and master class called the Jazz Conception Company.

The CD opens with the lively title cut, *Stream of Consciousness*. The ensemble dives right into a frenetic, but controlled, pace and tempo with Snidero leading the way with the head and his solo. Snidero paves the way and forges ahead while weaving his lines as he navigates through the harmonic and rhythmic challenges of the tune. His ensemble understands their leader's intent and not only follow him on his trip, but also provide ample support and props to successfully maneuver through the composition with ease and freedom of creativity.

Snidero's *Nirvana* is a lovely introspective ballad that evokes gentle, tranquil images of meditation and contemplation. The ensemble's subtle approach in providing a delicate, almost fragile backdrop, along with Snidero's sensitive, caressing tone, gives *Nirvana* an aura of inner reflection and serenity that brings the listener into the composition, and not let you go until the final note dissipates.

Fear One brings back a feel of controlled agitation, driven by Snidero's determined lines and Royston's persistent rhythm over a repeated guitar figure anchoring the composition and preventing it from tail spinning out of control. While always sounding on the edge, the musicians lay down their respective parts effortlessly and skillfully, giving the listener a smooth ride over a frenzied and daring musical voyage.

Vantage starts with a rubato opening of short phrases by Snidero's alto saxophone while the ensemble reacts with interjections of harmony, and a tapestry of sounds, reinforcing, but never detracting from the saxophone's intent and direction, before settling into a relaxed groove. Bollenback's forceful, but purposeful, electric guitar offers *Vantage* another dimension and perspective that enhances while further defining the outer limits of the tune, as well as the sound capabilities of the ensemble.