

Richard Boulger's Trumpet Rings in "Blues Twilight"

Richard Boulger's CD "Blues Twilight" shouts out that true hardbop jazz is alive and healthier than ever. Boulger and his quintet take a serious but fun romp through twelve original compositions that vet this trumpeter as both a compositional genius and an exceptional instrumentalist.

Boulger's group actually features two sets of sidemen. The first ensemble, from a 2007 session, puts tenor man David Schnitter out front with the fine backing of pianist Anthony Wonsey. On the 2006 session selections, Kris Jensen takes the tenor chair, and adds some interesting flute to the mix. The late John Hicks rounds out piano duties on the six earlier tracks. A solid, driving background is provided throughout by Dennis Irwin's bass fiddle and the drumming of Victor "Ya-Yah" Jones. Two of the pieces are Boulger's trumpet in solo, and one, "Perceptions" is a duet of trumpet and drums.

Boulger's free-form modal chant, "Eternal One," opens the disc with a fiery prayer in remembrance of pianist Hicks, who died shortly after the recording was made. Kris Jensen's tenor joins Boulger over the full voice call of John Hick's piano emoting the kind of beauty one would associate with Coltrane and Tyner.

"A Flower for Mary," inspired by the trumpeter's mother and her love of gardening, is one of the most captivating pieces on this disc. This ballad provides a powerful but mellow mix of Kris Jensen's flute while the crisp soprano sax of David Schnitter surrounds Boulger's flowing ballad style to fill this musical canvas with color.

Jensen's flute presents an almost classical tone with true strength across the octaves including a full-bodied lower register. Schnitter shows off a timbre

on the soprano with an oboe-like delicacy. Boulger, who studied with legend Freddie Hubbard displays a sweet yet fat approach to this softer side of his own music.

“Perceptions,” the following track on this recording jumps into a strong contrast; Boulger accompanied only by Ya-Yah Jones’ percussion for over three minutes of fast, free-form creativity.

Another favorite is Boulger’s ballad “Tears.” “Tears” is an uplifting melody over Dennis Irwin’s closely structured bass line and strong piano comping by Anthony Wonsey. Boulger employs a mute to lend a soft, ethereal voice to his horn as this leader follows Wonsey through a magic mist.

Boulger’s band interweaves their melodies with an impressive technical know-how and a fine balance of solid ideas and enhancing pauses. Their ensemble passages literally shout that this is what modern music is all about!

John Hicks was among the ranks of jazz’s finest keyboard stylist for over four decades. Listening to “Blues Twilight,” it is easy to project that Boulger and the other members of his crew are on a fast track of their own to the upper echelons of improvised music, leading another charge for the bop tradition. We all know that the hardbop of the Blue Note era remains firmly in style long beyond other “fad” ideas.

Visit Richard Boulger’s website at www.richardboulger.com. “Blues Twilight” can be purchased from both www.cdbaby.com and www.cduniverse.com, where you can also obtain Boulger’s early disc, “The Calling.”