



Music of Departures and Returns
Oscar Peñas (Musikoz)
by Marcia Hillman

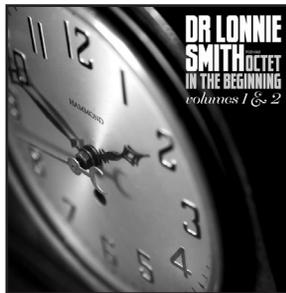
Barcelona native guitarist Oscar Peñas takes listeners on a musical voyage, by way of various genres that have influenced him, with his new CD. He arranged all the material, a collection of mostly originals with one composition each by Cuban Silvio Rodríguez, Johnny Mercer-Hoagy Carmichael and Catalan Federico Mompou. Peñas' accompanists are Sara Caswell (violin), Moto Fukushima (six-string electric bass) and Richie Barshay (drums/cajón), with upright bassist Edward Perez and percussionist Rogério Boccato on two tracks each. Additional guests are Paquito D'Rivera (clarinet on one track), Gil Goldstein (accordion on two) and a vocal by Esperanza Spalding.

Peñas' journey reflects his cultural and musical background as well as the experiences of a touring musician. He starts out with a visit to Brazil in his original "Paquito's Choro", referencing Brazilian urban pop music. This track features an inspired performance from its dedicatee with equally inspired guitar work by Peñas, the pair achieving a magical connection. Spalding's vocal on Rodríguez' "Rabo de Nube" starts out softly, then slowly builds in intensity towards the final note. Another stop takes listeners to

Argentina with Peñas' take on classic tango, "The Everyday Struggle", Goldstein on accordion in place of the more typical bandoneon. Another original, "Etude No. 1", displays the leader's classical guitar training, opening with a Bach-like melody, accented by rhythmic counterpoint by the bass. Mompou's "Canço Némero. 6" (Catalan for 'song') features the unusual but exciting instrumental combination of guitar and accordion on its melody. Most notable is the Mercer-Carmichael standard "Skylark"; Peñas' sensitive solo rendition is short but touching and heartfelt.

This is a delightful journey, guided by an artist with a rich imagination.

For more information, visit oscarpenas.com. This project is at BAMCafé Apr. 18th. See Calendar.



In The Beginning, Volumes 1 & 2
Dr. Lonnie Smith Octet (Pilgrimage Prod.)
by Brian Charette

Dr. Lonnie Smith is undoubtedly the greatest living Hammond organist from the heyday of the Chitlin' circuit. His organ playing is subtle. When he turns his Leslie speaker on, it's just a taste. Vibrato is also used very sparingly. Often, he will set up his audience with a simmering groove and lots of space before delivering

a shocking shout chorus with all the stops out. *In the Beginning Volumes 1 & 2* is a collection of Smith's early hits arranged for octet by the very able alto saxophonist Ian Hendrickson-Smith.

Smith really has a great musical dialogue with the horns - listen to how soulful organ phrases are answered by the section backgrounds on opener "Falling in Love". The solos are thoughtfully developed, with no unnecessary verbosity. The horn section statements, which often begin in unison, break out into interesting harmonies, such as the swampy fog on the salsa-infused "Call of the Wild". As the tune progresses, Andy Gravish's powerful trumpet is framed by the trading of Hendrickson-Smith, bass clarinetist John Ellis and baritone saxophonist Jason Marshall to create an especially interesting timbre.

The rhythm section of guitarist Ed Cherry, drummer Johnathan Blake and percussionist Little Johnny Rivero supplies a relentless undulating funk. Cherry can switch on a dime from super legit funk comping to great bebop lines. The killing groove of Blake is very cleverly augmented by Rivero, whose mélange of percussion instruments on Latin tunes "Slow High" and "Psychedelic Pi" provides the perfect complement.

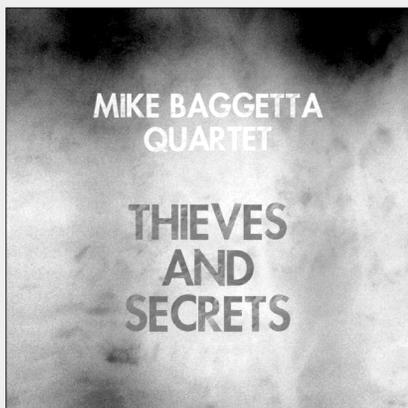
We also get to hear Smith sing a little, his smooth tenor floating amid the unison horns and sharp chunking of Cherry on "Move your Hand", Hendrickson-Smith and Marshall both killing on this cut. This album is a funk soul party from start to finish, a real treat hearing a master revisit his earlier work. The octet puts you in a trance and keeps you there - a must-have for organ jazz fans.

For more information, visit drlonnie-smith.com. This project is at Jazz Standard Apr. 19th-20th. See Calendar.

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