

Unity, A Retrospective

Antonio Ciacca Quintet with Steve Grossman *Lagos Blues*

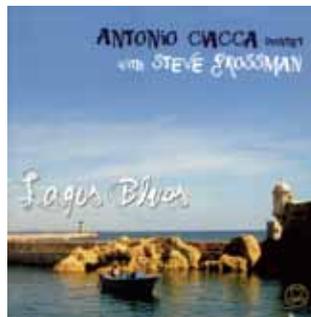
MOTÉMA 32
★★★★½

Antonio Ciacca is informed by a broad range of influences. Two are particularly obvious, those being hard bop and Duke Ellington.

But because most of the heat generated by *Lagos Blues* comes from the summit between two terrific tenor players, the emphasis here is less on the Ellington's tasty elegance and more on blowing.

The spark that ignites *Lagos Blues* comes from Ciacca's decision to invite his onetime mentor Steve Grossman to join in with his trio on these sessions. Because that group includes Stacy Dillard, the performances somewhat naturally break down to the synergy sought and achieved by the two saxophonists. While there is plenty to admire in the craftsmanship Ciacca displays as composer of the beautiful ballad "Nicoletta," the tendency elsewhere is to wait for the head to pass so we can hear the tenors dig in.

When playing in unison and in fourths at the top of "Take The D Train," the saxes ignite the band from the first beat; Ciacca benefits from coming in on his solo with bassist Kengo Nakamura and drummer Ulysses Owens already burning. Even better is when Grossman and Dillard roll up their sleeves and dive into carving



contests. When they trade verses and then half-verses on the Paul Chambers tune "Whims Of Chambers," real excitement builds as each responds to the other and then bats it back with his own distinctive spin. My guess is that Grossman has the richer, somewhat woollier timbre, with Dillard's being a little more brassy and tough. Each pushes outside the changes and pushes the rhythm section. But glimpses of real mastery occur more often with the one I'm pegging as Grossman—for instance, in how he gets under Ciacca's four-chord hook in the last four bars of "Body And Soul."

There is more to *Lagos Blues* than battling saxes: the medley of "Reflections In D" and "In A Sentimental Mood" showcases Ciacca, who handles the former unaccompanied, paying homage to Duke Ellington's harmonic essence and then transitioning with drums and bass into the latter with a blossoming chord sequence based on the melody rising and the bass descending chromatically. This performance, with the saxes sitting out, makes the point that Ciacca's love for the fiery groove is fed by insight and intelligence, too.

—Robert L. Doerschuk

Lagos Blues: Lagos Blues; Take The D Train; Nicoletta; Whims Of Chambers; Nico's Song; Body & Soul; Relections In D/In A Sentimental Mood. (53:16)
Personnel: Antonio Ciacca, piano; Stacy Dillard and Steve Grossman, tenor saxophones; Kengo Nakamura, bass; Ulysses Owens, drums.
Ordering info: motema.com

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Greg Black

Band Of Bones *Band Of Bones*

BB PRODUCTIONS 001
★★★★½

Multi-instrumentalist David Chamberlain, a flutist and expert in low-brass horns, assembled this unusual project. He's known elsewhere for leading The Hora Decima Brass Ensemble (with a wide ranging classical repertoire) and an Afro-Caribbean trio. While in jazz, nine trombones and rhythm isn't unprecedented—Slide Hampton's World of Trombones has a similar setup—Chamberlain views Band of Bones as a tribute to J.J. Johnson and Kai Winding's efforts to expand opportunities for the long horn. Though the personnel aren't nationally known, to a man they perform with professionalism and personality, each jousting to outdo the other with the most ear grabbing break or cleverly interpolated quote. Bob Suttman takes the first bone solo on Winding's rousing arrangement of "It's Allright With Me," sneaking in a nifty Thelonious Monk riff, then alternating with Nate Mayland and Matt McDonald. Suttman arranges "The Girl From Ipanema"



with a bruising intro before curiously agitated piano ostinatos suggest the suspense of the Rio beachfront onlooker.

Johnson's charts for "A Night In Tunisia" and "No Moon At All" are included with his original "Four Plus Four." On "Moon" Bruce Eidem takes one (his witty plunger work is featured next on Frank Wess' "Segue in C"); rasy Suttman follows, then the mellow but nimble McDonald, before Max Siegel's insouciant bass trombone. Your subwoofers better be ready for Siegel's buzzy solo on "Four By Four" because it sidles into the ear canal with wonderfully relaxed, subterranean phrasing. Amid the reheated chestnuts, "Bolivia" makes sense for trombonic navigation, and "Bonin'" boasts succinct blasts from everyone. Chamberlain takes the party out with flute on his arrangement of "El Manisero."

—Michael Jackson

Band Of Bones: It's Alright With Me; Four Plus Four; Bolivia; A Night in Tunisia; Laura; Getting Sentimental Over You; Dear Old Stockholm; Love Again; No Moon At All; Segue In C; Girl From Ipanema; Stardust; Bonin'; El Manisero. (67:29)
Personnel: David Chamberlain, trombone, flute, percussion; Bruce Eidem, Charlie Gordon, Mike Lormand, Nate Mayland, Matt McDonald, Bob Suttman, trombone; Max Siegel, Dale Turk, bass trombone; Kenny Ascher, piano; Dick Sarpola, bass; Mike Campenni, drums; Chemo Corniel, congas, cowbells.
Ordering info: bandofbones.com