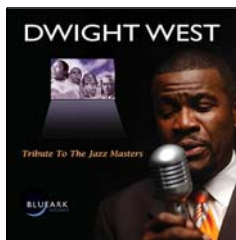


JAZZ IMPROV^{NY}

DWIGHT WEST



TRIBUTE TO THE JAZZ MASTERS—Blueark Records. www.bluearkrecords.com. *Yardbird Suite; Lush Life; Johnny Come Lately; Bright Mississippi; Misty; Bohemia After Dark; Work Song; Resolution; I'm A Fool To Want You; Equinox; Blue Skies; Lon-nie's Lament.*

PERSONNEL: Dwight West, vocals; Clifford Adams, trombone; Nat Adderley, Jr., piano; T.K. Blue, alto sax, flute; Greg Bufford, drums; George Caldwell, piano; Michael Logan, bass; Claudio Roditi, trumpet; Greg Searvance, drums.

By Clive Griffin

Even if you don't know who Dwight West is, it is abundantly clear who his influences are before even opening the package. An inset illustration of Mt. Rushmore appears on the album cover of the vocalist's album *Tribute To The Masters*. In the graphic, the images of John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and Billy Strayhorn replacing the four American Presidents—the ones you would otherwise see if you visited the amazing architecture in South Dakota.

By way of background, West has performed around the world with Amiri and Amina Baraka's poetry ensemble for almost two decades, and the New Jersey native also performs with a big band regularly. Baraka also wrote the liner notes.

On this album, West is surrounded by a cast of experienced accompanists, and blows through a collection of twelve well-known jazz compositions and Great American Standards. He also wrote the lyrics to all but the standards. *Tribute To The Masters* gets off to a bright start with Charlie Parker's "Yardbird Suite." T.K. Blue sparkles in his rendering of the melody for the first chorus. West delivers the lyrics in the second chorus. His warm baritone voice is immediately fetching. Between his sound, the rhythm section accompaniment, and a quick look at the repertoire, it is quickly apparent that this is going to be an enjoyable hour of straight ahead acoustic jazz.

Nat Adderley Jr. steps to the stage to back West on Strayhorn's "Lush Life." Adderley sensitively follows West's out of tempo rendition of the verse. The two are joined by bassist Michael Logan, and drummer Greg Bufford for the chorus, which moves into a gentle ballad tempo. West's delivery is both relaxed and vibrant, highlighted by his carefully developed vibrato. Needless to say, Johnny Hartman's classic recording of "Lush Life" with John Coltrane, virtually made the song his. West is certainly influenced by Hartman, and stands tall in his own offering of this classic.

West offers another tip of the hat to Billy Strayhorn, singing his composition "Johnny Come Lately." Although the lyrics themselves didn't capture me, West nonetheless swings powerfully in expressing them. T.K. Blue steps to the plate with another impressive solo.

It is rare that we get to hear Monk's "Bright Mississippi," and more infrequent that we get treated to a vocal rendition of it. West is confident, and his big sound bring to life this extraordinary composition. Trombonist Clifford Adams joins the festivities, and with a big round sound, crafts a wonderfully melodic chorus.

Erroll Garner's "Misty" is perhaps one of the most often performed and recorded songs in history, and probably one of the biggest money-makers. And, no matter how often I hear it, I never get tired of the magnificently colorful set of chord changes, the melody and lyrics—especially when delivered as warmly, sensitively and musically as Dwight West does here. West's performance here makes the track one of the highlights of the set.

West performs three Coltrane compositions on this release, in addition to the Strayhorn tune "Lush Life" that is associated with Coltrane and Johnny Hartman by virtue of their classic 1963 collaboration. West covers "Lonnie's Lament," "Equinox," and "Resolution." The latter composition was originally recorded on Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*. It's a medium tempo piece, with a powerful swinging groove, and while it is very much melodically and rhythmically mainstream, it suggests a more exploratory realm, and adds to the expansiveness of hues and colors of the music that West has recorded here.

Other highlights on *Tribute To The Jazz Masters* include Nat Adderley's "Work Song." While Nat Jr. appears on other tracks, pianist Caldwell appears here. Incidentally, Caldwell is a strong and thoughtful accompanist, whose solos throughout the album are consistently superb. Claudio Roditi turns in a noteworthy performance on this one as well.

Tribute To The Jazz Masters provides an hour of delightful listening, and a quality snapshot of the vocal and lyric-writing talents of Dwight West.

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