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CD Reviews: Antonio Ciacca, "Rush Life"

Posted by: editoron Monday, June 09, 2008 - 08:16 AM

By: Edward Blanco

Pianist and composer Antonio Ciacca is an internationally recognized recording artists primarily from Italy though he was born in Germany (from Italian parents). Currently based in New York where he serves as Director of Programming for the world renowned Jazz at Lincoln Center, Ciacca has an extensive discography though he makes his debut recording on the Motema label with "Rush Life." A veteran musician who has performed with the likes of Steve Grossman, Art Farmer, Dave Liebman, Lee Konitz and the late Steve Lacy, Ciacca has an affinity for the saxophone and so includes a limited horn section on this album.

Influenced early on by Afro-American and spiritual music, his love for jazz has evolved into the current contemporary jazz movement which marks the flavor of "Rush Life." The music here is traditional straight ahead with slices of bop. The pianist assembles a quintet of first-call New York musicians that include bassist Kengo Nakamura, drummer Rodney Green and the horn section of trumpeter Joe Magnarelli and saxophonist Stacy Dillard.

Except for Benny Golson's "I Remember Clifford" and the Kaper-Washington standard "On Green Dolphin Street," Ciacca provides all original material and none so sparkling as the harmonically-rich opener, dedicated to Wynton Marsalis, "Squazin." He follows with "Chipewha," a superb intricate charmer demonstrating his ample chops on the piano as the Magnarelli and Dillard and bassist Nakamura weigh in with tasteful solos of their own.

Golson's "I Remember Clifford" (for the late great trumpeter Clifford Brown) features both Ciacca and Magnarelli on some extraordinary beautiful soft lines. For a taste of hard-bop don't miss "Flat 5 Flat 9" containing fiery solos from everyone. The pianist provides a stylish arrangement of "On Green Dolphin Street" and leads the title tune into territory sounding similar to the great "Body and Soul" which explains Dillard's soft saxophone phrasings here. Other notable tunes include "Prince of Newark" and "Without a Song."

Pianist Antonio Ciacca scores a winner with "Rush Life" delivering excellent melodically-rich charts amplified by clever arrangements and marvelous performances from Ciacca and his very able Quintet. There's absolutely no reason to rush through this one, sit back, press play and enjoy a solid session of modern jazz played with finesse and swagger.

Year: 2008

Label: Motema Music

Artist Web: www.antonociacca.com

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