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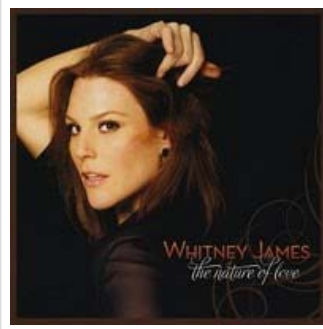
Ken Franckling's Jazz Notes

Wednesday, February 3, 2010

CDs of Note...

Whitney James, [The Nature of Love](#) (Damselfly Productions)

Singer Whitney James's debut CD is a dandy. The singer, who divides her non-touring time between Florida and New York City, has a very good handle on the essential jazz vocal qualities that elude so many aspirants - phrasing, timing, and a shading / shaping / twisting emphasis on the lyrics in ways that better serve the material. And she knows how to become part of the band, not use it as ornamentation, or vice-versa. She's got wonderful teammates here - with Ingrid Jensen on trumpet and flugelhorn, Joshua Wolff on piano, Matt Clohesy on bass and Jon Wikan on drums, to explore songs that all tough on aspects of love. Jensen's playing is masterful, whether she is soloing or comping behind James. The clear highlight is their work on the Benny Golson classic "Whisper Not." I also love Jensen's poignant horn work on Jimmy Rowles' "The Peacocks." She and James make a great team - and James's project is richer for her creative support.



Jamie Cullum, [The Pursuit](#) (Verve)

Not strictly jazz, too sophisticated for pure pop, and enough energy and showmanship to power a small city. That about sums up the talented Brit Jamie Cullum. You've got to love his charm and enthusiasm - and way with a song - regardless of whether you enjoy his in-concert piano gymnastics. His latest recording, *The Pursuit*, is his first in four years - and it is quite interesting. It's a blend of standards and originals - and a few pop/rock covers. I particularly like the opener, a Frank Wess-arranged version of "Just One of Those Things" (recorded in live performance with the Count Basie Orchestra) and his version of Rhianna's 2007 hit single "Don't Stop the Music." The latter song's incessant energy could be a Cullum anthem. He also takes on current economic events with his own "Wheels" (key refrain: The wheels are falling off the world"). **This a March 2 U.S. release, though it has been out since November in the U.K.**



John Stein, [Raising the Roof](#) (Whaling City Sound)

Boston-based guitarist John Stein is a mainstreamer whose music always



Ken Franckling is a veteran jazz journalist and freelance photographer specializing in music photography.

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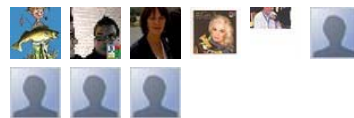
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swings hard in service to the melody. This time out, he's working with Koichi Sato keyboards, John Lockwood bass and Brazil's Zé Eduardo Nazario on drums. It is a fine, empathetic band tackling Stein's new arrangements on seven jazz standards, plus two very nice originals: "Elvin!" and "Wild Woods." The re-arrangements are interesting. For example, they accelerate the tempo on Horace Silver's classic "Nica's Dream" without diminishing the tune's beauty. Conversely, he takes a laid-back approach to Thad Jones's "A Child is Born." Stein is an inventive veteran player deserving far-greater recognition. If you're not yet familiar, do give him a listen. He's creative and his music is solid, harmonically and melodically inventive - and pleasant.



Posted by Ken Franckling at [7:30 PM](#)

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