

Jazz Pairings Make For Thrilling Music

By Kevin C. Madigan

The Brian Lynch / Eddie Palmieri Project—*Simpático* (Artist Share)



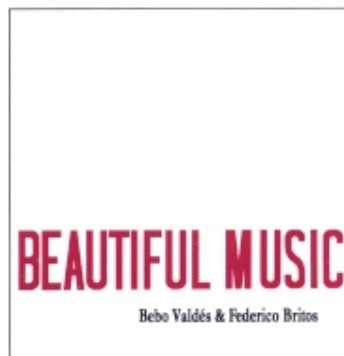
Latin jazz is alive and well, and *Simpático* has everything that's good about the genre. The Project is comprised of two stylish veterans, trumpeter and musical director Brian Lynch and pianist Eddie Palmieri, backed by 17 top-notch musicians. There is busy percussion, very Cuban, and the album's title dictates the mood: charming and enticing, a mix of salsa and jazz that captivates from start to finish.

It kicks off with a swinging, energetic "The Palmieri Effect," which does a fine job of laying the groundwork for the rest of the album. The outstanding vocalist Lila Downs leads on "Que Seria La Vida," a mournful ballad featuring the renowned Phil Woods on a tender saxophone solo. Woods takes center stage on the African-influenced "Slippery," and on "Jazz Impromptu." "Tema Para Marissa" is a romantic bolero ideal for a slow dance. The caliber of playing is brilliant throughout and solidifies Lynch's reputation as an innovator. A website chronicling the creation of the album, complete with rehearsals, compositional sketches, web logs and downloads, is a generous gesture indeed.

Bebo Valdes & Federico Britos—*We Could Make Such Beautiful Music Together* (Calle 54)

Beautiful this is. Bebo Valdes, now well into his eighties, has long been hailed in his native Cuba as not only a pianist, but also a composer, arranger and bandleader. We are gradually losing this generation of Cuban maestros, but Valdes, prolific, is being rewarded with award nominations aplenty. On this recording he teamed with violinist Federico Britos from Uruguay. This is an inspired pairing, and it has created glorious, languid, sad music, but there is joy in the playing of it. Traces of the Tango and the Bossa Nova emerge frequently, to wonderful effect. The pianist cedes the spotlight to the violinist most of the time, yet there is a subtle interplay between the instruments that shows the skill and dexterity of both.

Britos, now based in Miami, is a master of all Latin music, and contributes his own composition, the cheerful, up-tempo "Together." It fits in nicely with a variety of covers, such as Bill Evans' "Waltz For Debbie," Gershwin's "Someone To Watch Over Me" and Jobim's "Luiza."



Wycliffe Gordon & Jay Leonhart—*This Rhythm On My Mind* (Bluesback)



This release brings together two seasoned jazz players who bring more to the album than just their instruments: they sing, scat, throw in a didgeridoo for good measure, and generally have a fine time. Wycliffe Gordon, the younger of the pair, plays a mean trombone and Jay Leonhart is the bassist. They revel in their creativity, even if they do seem a tad pleased with themselves.

Quite a few of the lyrics are about the jazz form itself, as in "Eddie Harris" and "Lester Leaps In," the latter written by the great Lester Young. "Mr. Leonhart Mr. Gordon" is an amusing back-and-forth ditty with each man taking turns addressing the other about the pleasures of working together. In the title track a sassy Gordon describes how he builds a composition. Back-up musicians include tenor saxophonists Wayne Escoffrey and Harry Allen and distinguished percussionist Jim Saporito.

Leonhart and Gordon at times try too hard to pamper their audience, which is hardly necessary. With their kind of talent, all they need to do is get on with the job at hand.

Worthy of Mention: Jonah Smith (Relix)—heavyweights Bill Frisell and Garth Hudson accompany this exciting new singer and keyboardist. Lush Life: The Untold Story of Billy Strayhorn (Blue Note)—soundtrack to the documentary of the same name, featuring stellar cast of musicians doing Strayhorn tunes. Ce (Nonesuch)—revered Brazilian songsmith Caetano Veloso returns with a rock sound. Surprisingly, it works.

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