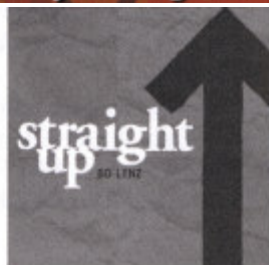


JAZZ IMPROV®

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B.D. Lenz

STRAIGHT UP—Apria Records.

www.apriarecords.com. *Uh-Huh; Straight Up; I Take Refuge in U; Joe Citizen; Love, As A Flower Blossoms; 3+5=Blue; Bridges; Quiet Desperation; Here and Now; It's The Way of the World' Us and Them.*

PERSONNEL: B.D. Lenz, electric and acoustic Guitars; Joe Ashlar, piano and Keys; James Rosocha, electric bass and Dave Edwards upright bass; Tom Cottone and Karl Latham, drums; Geoff Mattoon, sax.

By Bob Gish

Here's a hard driving, straight away, and, yes, straight up assembly of tunes for the most part (with the exception of "Us and Them") written and arranged by guitarist B.D. Lenz that fuses rock and funk and smooth jazz in, ironically, the purest of ways. "Bridges," for example, is a cut representative of just how alluring, accommodating, and restorative fusion, when done masterfully, can be.

The title tune is a modal musing featuring Lenz's beautifully sustained, far ranging guitaristics along with James Rosocha's funkadelic electric bass against Joe Ashlar's pylon-like keyboard chording and Tom Cotton's solid back beat drumming. It's indicative of the tight togetherness of the group - all of whom are very much at home with Lenz's concepts and his oh so facile execution of them. "It's The Way of the World," later in the play list, is another modal track with near heavenly hypnotic power.

This is an offering which deserves not just attention but accolades by Beyond Jazz and Chill fans everywhere. There's a soft, smooth spot or two as well - to wit "Love, As A Flower Blossoms," a poignant testimonial to the romantic resonance of the acoustic guitar played against sparse yet mellifluous piano and key-board

string effects.

Something in the same vein, albeit crossed with the thematic benchmark set by "Straight Up," is "3+5=Blue" which features alternating solos by Ashlar backed up by Lenz, Cottone, and Rosocha, and then Lenz supported by Ashlar and company. It's a fine cut and the kind of sound one would drive across town or even to distant points to hear. This is no pedestrian quartet. These hombres are here to play, ready to zoom, blast and accelerate up and away.

Other fasten-your-seat-belt tunes include "Joe Citizen" where Rosocha's bass sets the groove Cottone's drums make their presence felt foreground and background. Ashar and Lenz use effects to, well, great effect, as usual in great consonance with the group. It's a great arrangement leaving one wanting more of that special quality large sound. Note worthy too is Rosocha's extended solo on "Quiet Desperation," proving yet again that the electric bass in such hands claims a crucial and encompassing piece of musical turf.

Straight Up was recorded in just a couple of days at Skyline Studios in Hampton N.J. during the winter of 2007. The result is so there, so ideal, so darn near perfect that it makes a listener want to head straight up there in a kind of pilgrimage to quality - quality of musicianship, quality of recording, quality of what we all seek but seldom truly achieve. Short of such a journey there's the transport offered by the CD, one not to be missed. One to treasure!