

All About Jazz

Day In Night Out

by C. Andrew Hovan

Most of us find that there are certain musicians who speak to us through their music in a profound way that makes for a special connection. These are the artists who find a prominent space in our collections because we continuously seek out all of their current musical endeavors. For this reviewer, saxophonist Walt Weiskopf has always been a musician to watch. Not to take anything away from other jazz saxophonists, but Weiskopf's musical persona is the complete package. He has an identifiable sound, chops aplenty, great ideas, and a strong emotional base that is often absent in other technically gifted players. Beginning with 1993's *Simplicity*, Weiskopf has led a strapping and diverse series of albums for Criss Cross that rank among the finest the label has to offer. Additionally, his name has been getting out there more frequently these days as he continues to perform with rock icon Steely Dan.

His first large ensemble work since *Siren* (Criss Cross, 2000), *Day In Night Out* brings back a few familiar faces from his previous nonet records, but ultimately opts for a smaller unit composed of some new friends. As usual, the emphasis here is on Weiskopf's own unique compositions and a few sagacious reworkings of select standards. The title track opens up the program with one of Walt's signature licks, namely a tightly voiced serpentine melody with the saxophone choir speaking and breathing as one. Harmonized backing lines soon follow and the whole thing ends up sounding much larger than the sum of these few parts. Weiskopf has a wonderful knack for working in three quarter time and "West Side Waltz" is just the latest example of his prowess. It's also a great place to hear the palette of colors he uses in creating his canvas which, in this case, finds the humming of flutes figuring prominently in the mix.

Rich textures and hues mark the slower numbers such as "City of Sin" and "Off Yellow," where Weiskopf gives as much prominence to the ensemble structures as he does to the solos. It's interesting to note that in the liners, the saxophonist comments on the influence of Don Sebesky and the CTI albums of the '70s. He comments on the iconic arranger's skill of achieving a large sound with a small number of musicians and that's exactly what Weiskopf attains in his work here, as heard in the cacophony he generates on the opening gambit of "Lean and Green." Equally intriguing are the horn accents that punctuate a splendid reading of "Heather on the Hill," yet another standard to get the red carpet treatment arranging wise from Weiskopf.

As a leader, Weiskopf is more than generous with sharing the solo space. Prominent in the mix are Andy Fusco, a firebrand with a sound that nods towards James Spaulding, and Gary Smulyan, heir apparent to the burly style of the late, great Pepper Adams. Filling some big shoes is drummer Kendrick Scott, since Weiskopf usually prefers the company of modern powerhouse Billy Drummond. What Scott may lack in visceral punch, he more than makes up for in a swinging beat and crisp sound that shades his accompaniment to the needs of the arrangement. Weiskopf himself is so fluent that he is able to execute anything and his tone retains its weight regardless of range. A thoroughly accomplished work from start to finish, *Day In Night Out* can be appreciated for its technical virtuosity, but remains surprisingly accessible. It not only sets a benchmark for jazz that functions within the tradition, but speaks with individuality and emotional attachment. Need one ask for anything more?