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WALT WEISKOPF

"Sleepless Nights"

Criss Cross

There's almost no end to the list of saxophonist-composers in jazz, though few play and write as well as this young big band veteran whose professional credits include stints with the Buddy Rich and Toshiko Akiyoshi ensembles. As a player, Weiskopf commands a virile tenor sound that has inspired critics and fans alike to make flattering comparisons with John Coltrane. Just as impressive, though, are Weiskopf's gifts as a composer. He draws from a broad range of tones and textures, something that was particularly apparent on his last nonet session, and imbues all of his own recordings with plenty of light and life. "Sleepless Nights" finds Weiskopf in a sextet setting, playing tenor with his usual authority and contributing seven original tunes and a genuinely fresh arrangement of the Frank Sinatra standard "Come Rain or Come Shine."

As you might expect of a musician who has spent a lot of time in a big band horn section, Weiskopf appreciates the kind of robust and spiraling harmonies that introduce the album's opening number, "Inner Loop," and the colorful melding of reeds and brass heard on "Liberian Lullaby." Yet for all the horn section craft and cunning on display, Weiskopf doesn't write for just the talented frontline, which includes alto saxist Andy Fusco and trombonist Conrad Herwig. Treating the sextet as a coherent voice for his compositions, Weiskopf is careful to make the rhythm section composed of pianist Joel Weiskopf, Walt's younger brother, bassist James Genus and drummer Billy Drummond integral to his alternately intimate and explosive sound.

--Mike Joyce