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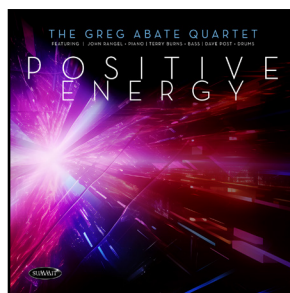
**"...THE MELLOW SOUND OF A
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Positive Energy
Greg Abate (Summit)
by Scott Yanow

Veteran saxophonist Greg Abate (who turns 78 this month), while based in New England, has been visiting New Mexico on a yearly basis for quite some time. While there he always renews his ties with pianist John Rangel, with whom he has collaborated for 16 years. Despite their longtime friendship, however, *Positive Energy* turns out to be their first recording together.

While Abate is skilled on several reed instruments, including flute, he sticks to the alto (his strongest axe) throughout the new album. A superior bop-based player, here he is heard adapting to the modal playing of Rangel, and sounding at his most modern. The quartet, with Terry Burns (bass) and David Post (drums), each who have occasional brief solos, performs six Abate originals, four songs by the pianist plus one standard ("Easy Living").

The new material, which falls into the modern post-bop mainstream, inspires consistently inventive statements by Abate and Rangel. The album opening title track has the pianist playing a rhythm a little reminiscent of "Seven Steps to Heaven", while the melody and chord changes are quite original. While one could imagine Thelonious Monk composing Rangel's dark "Monkism", he makes no attempt to mimic Monk and instead plays in his own adventurous style. "Lookin' Ahead" lives up to its title with the leader stretching himself and sounding quite passionate. Some of the other songs include the jazz waltz "Hazy Moon", "Song for My Brother" (which has some soulful piano), Rangel's somewhat mournful "Little Bird" and his "Growing All the Time" (a relative of "What Is This Thing Called Love"). The latter, along with "J.A.G." (based on "When Lights Are Low"), is the most boppish of the originals. "Giving Flight to Imagination" and "Deep Seated Reality" are serious modal numbers that feature the pianist in top form, while the alto saxophonist makes a masterful statement on "Easy Living".

Greg Abate and John Rangel audibly bring out the best in each other throughout *Positive Energy*.

For more info visit summitrecords.com. Abate is at Smalls May 10 and Jazz Forum May 11. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



China Afro Cuba
Gonzalo Rubalcaba/Dongfeng Liu (ZOHO)
by Ken Dryden

Duo piano albums have long been an opportunity for two pianists to both blend and contrast their approach to the instrument. The challenge, however, is not only to anticipate the direction of the other musician but to create unique, intriguing music. Veteran pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba, a native of Cuba, has been a master

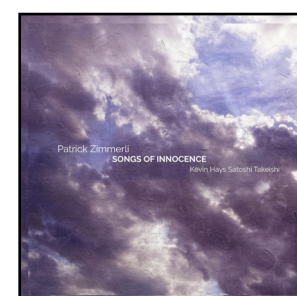
of a wide range of styles over his long career, though best known as a prominent Afro-Cuban and salsa player. Here he joins Dongfeng Liu, born and raised in China, to create a unique blend of traditional Chinese music and jazz. The album title gives the impression that this is strictly "Chinese Music Meets Afro-Cuban Jazz," but the pianists cover far more stylistic ground beyond that dynamic.

The traditional Chinese song "Jasmine Flower" begins with a whisper in a traditional setting before blossoming into a playful mood, gradually working into a blazing Afro-Cuban romp that signals the pianists are of one mind. Another traditional song, "Kangding Love Song", takes on a bluesy air with a touch of funk. "The Moon Represents My Heart" is a modern Chinese pop song, written by Taiwan-born Weng Ching-hsi (1936-2012) for the late vocalist Teresa Teng. It is treated as a tender ballad without flourishes. Their interpretation of the traditional Chinese piece "Lofty Mountains and Flowing Waters" initially conveys the imagery of its title with a sense of majesty and drama, though as the tempo builds, it is transformed into a virtuoso Latin arrangement.

The album highlight is the lyrical medley of He Zhanhao's "The Butterfly Lovers" and the Harold Arlen, E.Y. Harburg standard "Over the Rainbow", though the Afro-Cuban rhythm here is more subtle. Bassist Scott LaFaro's "Gloria's Steps" (originally recorded and published as "Gloria's Step") was a staple of the Bill Evans Trio when LaFaro was a member. The piano duo introduces it in a straight-ahead manner, but quickly detours onto a new path that navigates many twists and turns, barely acknowledging its roots. Xian Xinghai's "Ode to the Yellow River", a number written during Japan's invasion of China, initially adds an infectious Afro-Cuban bass line, though the center of the piece incorporates snippets of bop and gospel accents too.

China Afro Cuba succeeds well due to the chemistry and combined vision of Gonzalo Rubalcaba and Dongfeng Liu.

For more info visit zohomusic.com. Liu is at Queens Public Library May 3. See Calendar.



Songs of Innocence
Patrick Zimmerli (Emergence Music Productions)
by John Pietaro

Crossing boundaries, *Songs of Innocence*, the 14th album of Patrick Zimmerli, is the first on the saxophonist-composer's own self-released imprint, Emergence Music Productions, and seemingly his first inspired by iconic poet William Blake (1757-1827). Blake was a revolutionary and comrade of Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin and other dissident intellectuals of his day. He embraced simplicity and naivete within poetry while artfully examining harsh and dark elements, particularly in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794), a work inspired by children's literature and nursery rhyme, yet imbedded with aspects of pain and loss. Even a Blake scholar possibly couldn't identify which Zimmerli works directly speak of Blake's 23-poem collection, nor does the leader ever cite specifics, so the listener must assume that the inspiration is overall.

There are a few references, however, that are connected to Blake, including "Dreamscape" with its soft melodic phrases and conflicting crashing chords,