



High Standards
The Ted Rosenthal Songbook
Ted Rosenthal (TMR Music)
by Marilyn Lester

Ted Rosenthal's career began in 1988 when he won the second annual Thelonious Monk International Piano Competition. Deservedly, over the years his professional life has blossomed as he's emerged as a versatile leader and dynamic virtuoso of the keys. His recently-released *High Standards* is the first of the four-part series "Trio in 4 Acts" and *The Ted Rosenthal Songbook* is the second. Both trio albums feature Martin Wind or Noriko Ueda (bass) and Tim Horner or Quincy Davis (drums). Their contributions throughout, improvisational and technical, can't be underestimated. With Rosenthal's brilliant arrangements, these players exceed mere support, becoming true collaborators. And their collective mission: to transform familiar tunes into a new way of hearing and experiencing them.

The nine tracks of *High Standards* open with the brilliance of Leonard Bernstein and "Jet Song" from *West Side Story*. Being Bernstein, the tune is harmonically complex. Rosenthal matches the changes and bridges with corresponding intelligence—runs, riffs, melodic stretches and exquisite phrasing in which, and throughout, two hands seem like four. Wind and Horner are especially integral to this piece, contributing passages and accenting that give special energy to empower a tough gang's theme song, which ends in a veritable rumble of sound. With a hat tip to the 50th anniversary of *A Chorus Line* on Broadway, the Marvin Hamlisch "One" begins with the group grooving on an energetic syncopated introduction of the theme, with Rosenthal taking off and tripping close to the melodic through-line, salting it with creative ideas, and ending on a sweet, tinkling one-hand coda that makes this interpretation a singular sensation. Another Broadway gem, Burton Lane's "Old Devil Moon" from *Finian's Rainbow*, is pure uptempo bop. The album also offers ballads, such as the novelty song, "Everything Happens to Me" (Matt Dennis), and the perennial Hoagy Carmichael favorite, "Skylark". Closer is Rosenthal's effervescent rendition of "The Cup Bearers" (Tom McIntosh), the jazz standard popularized by trumpeter Kenny Dorham.

The Ted Rosenthal Songbook is a collection of ten originals, the first four—"Always Believe", "You Make Me Laugh", "We Are Married", "Everything My Father Never Told Me"—from his jazz opera, *Dear Erich*, a work with the intention to through-compose as the Gershwins did for *Porgy and Bess*. "Always Believe" is intensely melodic, with a rising story arc, giving the tune the air of hope aimed for. The three following numbers are aptly titled, respectively humorous, jubilant and mournful. The literally off-beat "Just for Kicks", in 7/4, was inspired by Cole Porter, producing a catchy, devil-may-care air and enough space for bassist Ueda to stretch out in her feature. Likewise, "Partly Sunny" and "Pizzette" were inspired by Gershwin, Maurice Ravel and Horace Silver. The album wraps up with "Radiance", written for Rosenthal's wife, Lesley, a sheerly heartfelt, gorgeous melodic tribute.

There are plenty of adjectives to recommend both albums: elegant, sophisticated, joyful, gratifying... ultimately they're a great listen from a truly inspired artist.

For more info visit tedrosenthal.com. Rosenthal is at Mezzrow Sep. 12-13 (as leader) and Birdland Theater Wednesdays (with Frank Vignola). See Calendar.

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