

IN MEMORIAM 2025

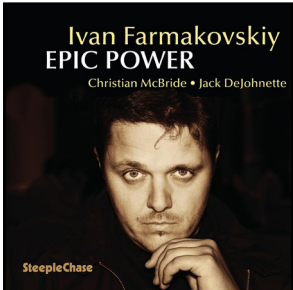
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MIKE WOFFORD
TETSU YAMAUCHI
LUBOŠ ZAJÍČEK



Epic Power
Ivan Farmakovskiy, Christian McBride,
Jack DeJohnette (SteepleChase)
by Jeff Cebulski

The Russia-born, bred and raised-on-American-jazz, pianist Ivan Farmakovskiy was a big deal in the late ’90s and early 2000s. Mixing deft keyboard clarity with impressive inventiveness, Farmakovskiy won the 1997 Europe Jazz Contest in Belgium, played in a number of ensembles and orchestras (including a quartet with the late Benny Golson and expatriate trumpeter Valery Ponomarev), and then traveled to NYC in 2008 to record *Next To The Shadow*. That debut album included hard and post bop selections performed by a quintet that included countryman, saxophonist Igor Butman, trumpeter Ryan

Kisor, bassist Ugonna Okegwo and drummer Gene Jackson. His sophomore effort soon followed in 2010 with *The Way Home* (Butman Music), a Russian quartet effort with American drummer Donald Edwards.

Epic Power, a trio session recorded that same year as his second album, has only just recently emerged on SteepleChase. Somehow it had remained in the vaults. The question is why, given that Farmakovskiy’s top-tier rhythm team consisted of renowned bassist Christian McBride and the recently-deceased Master of drums, **Jack DeJohnette (1942-2025)**, whose history itself spanned generations, with work ranging from Charles Lloyd, Bill Evans, Miles Davis, Joe Henderson, Wayne Shorter and Keith Jarrett to John Abercrombie, Joanne Brackeen, Pat Metheny, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, et al. Based on the sterling results, as if there was any doubt, this formidable duo came through, providing the classic bop-disciple with spirited, professional support through the album’s nine selections, including originals, derivations of Russian folk tunes, plus a song from The Beatles. That synergy becomes evident right away on “Soul Inside Out”, a hard bop excursion that features the great DeJohnette in fills and a robust drum solo during Farmakovskiy’s Bud Powell-like expressions. The ballad, “The Day Before”, is typical of the pianist-leader’s arrangements, starting quietly

and building up along the way, with McBride having a typically-melodic solo turn. “Conciliation” follows, a waltz that has nifty runs tossed around. The pianist’s stylistic breadth is revealed on “Orange”, a calypso-ish tune that includes another masterful DeJohnette break. “And I Love Her” (Paul McCartney), covered by many, gets an even-slower treatment than Shirley Horn’s lyric-twisted version, but smolders as much. “Professor” is a New Orleans-style treat, with Professor Longhair the obvious object of respect.

Farmakovskiy has since moved to Italy, and has only recorded once since his 2010 sessions, which was in 2014 as a member of Russian saxophonist Serge Golovnya’s quintet (*Touching the Sky*, Butman Music). One can find some contemporary live ensemble performances on YouTube, but in the absence of more, *Epic Power* thus becomes the most accessible recorded testimony to his prowess, blessed by two of America’s great jazz artists. We can thank Nils Winther and SteepleChase not only for reintroducing Farmakovskiy, but also for reminding us just how powerful Jack DeJohnette was before his passing on Oct. 26 last year at age 83: the G.O.A.T. to many critics and fans, he never phoned it in.

For more info visit steeplechase.dk