



Open Air: The Complete Saxophone Quartet Compositions of Julius Hemphill
Marty Ehrlich (Out of Your Head)
by Tom Greenland

Only Marty Ehrlich could've pulled this project off so successfully. As a long-time friend, mentee, sideman and collaborator of the late saxophonist-composer Julius Hemphill, he has both the requisite artistry and life experience to present *Open Air: The Complete Saxophone Quartet Compositions of Julius Hemphill*, a double album containing all 41 of Hemphill's known saxophone/woodwind quartet pieces.

Folks familiar with World Saxophone Quartet recordings from the late '70s through the late '80s will have heard about two-thirds of these arrangements as performed by Hemphill, Oliver Lake, David Murray and Hamiet Bluiett. What they won't have heard is another dozen or so pieces that Ehrlich discovered while establishing the Julius Hemphill Archive at New York University, which make their recording debut here. Many of the compositions are arranged for soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxophones, but a significant number utilize various combinations of flutes (soprano, alto) and clarinets (soprano, alto, bass) and/or saxophones. With the help of saxophonists Allan Chase, Robert DeBellis,

Brian Landrus, Andy Laster, Jeff Lederer, Lisa Parrott, Jason Robinson and Andrew White, Ehrlich recorded the repertoire in two formats: as live, in-studio quartet performances, or (aping his mentor's *modus operandi*) as overdubbed tracks. Amazingly, the latter technique doesn't affect the vitality of the performances because, as Ehrlich observes in his liner notes, "each piece has its own expressive imperative."

Hemphill's voice as a composer-arranger resonates with that of Thad Jones, who took swing and blues, core values of Count Basie's sound, and turned them into something more contemporary. Hemphill's down-home roots are likewise evident, even as his melodic lines explore the post-bop frontier, while his harmonies veer from gospel chorales, to swinging solis and tuttis heard in big band arrangements, to angsty soundscapes more germane to contemporary classical praxis.

Space prohibits the detailed praise this project deserves, but a few highlights should suffice. "R&B" and "Stick" epitomize the folksy futurism referenced above, the former with sexy soli and slow striptease, the latter with funk and finesse. "My First Winter, I", on the other hand, suggests a Nordic landscape and an existential soundscape: gorgeous but chilling. "Hearts" is wonderfully weird, laced with plummy chords. "Pillars Latino" is catchy and complex, with tricky cascade entrances and knotty counterpoint. "Big Foot", full of quirks and twists, is admirably executed by the quartet. "Ji Ji Tune" is joyfully outrageous. "Void", just over a minute long, is nevertheless chock-full of clever ideas and varied textures.

While the album's emphasis is on composition, there are distinguished solo turns as well: DeBellis' upfront alto on "Untitled", a chart that could serve as a treatise on melodic chromaticism; Landrus' warm, full-throated baritone, which elevates "Bumpkin" and

"Connections"; Robinson's fine tenor work on "My First Winter, II"; and Ehrlich's silky, Johnny Hodges-esque alto lighting a romantic fire on "Georgia Blue".

A significant release, *Open Air* is testimony to both Ehrlich the artist/curator and Hemphill the arranger/innovator.

For more info visit outofyourheadrecords.com. Ehrlich is at Greenwich House Music School Nov. 5 (part of "Celebrating Frank Kimbrough") and The Clemente Nov. 10 (part of the Jeff Schlanger Memorial). See Calendar.



In Light of a New Moon
Asaf Yuria (JOJO)
by Rachel Smith

On *In Light of a New Moon*, Tel Aviv-born tenor saxophonist Asaf Yuria continues to explore the hard bop tradition he has long admired and grew up in. The group's sound here, and lineup—George Cables (piano), Omer Avital (bass) and Billy Hart (drums), with Joe Magnarelli (trumpet on two of the album's seven tracks)—harkens to classic jazz sessions at the legendary Rudy Van Gelder Studio, once upon a time in Hackensack, NJ and now in Englewood Cliffs, where Yuria's new album was recorded.



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