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The Live Performance Label for Smalls Jazz Club

WINNING SPINS

By George Kanzler

THE TENOR SAXOPHONE CONTINUES to be one of the dominant voices in jazz. In this Winning Spins, we look at a pair of post-Coltrane tenors, one who emerged in the 1990s, the other coming to the fore in this first decade of the 21st Century. Yet it is the younger one, Brandon Wright, who adheres more to the traditions of hard-bop than the elder, Marc Mommaas, whose approach is more adventurous, even ethereal. Format follows function and conception here too, with Wright fronting a traditional quintet/quartet and Mommaas opting for a loose trio/quartet group joined by guitar(s) and drum kit. Moreover, on both CDs, the creative contributions of the percussionists involved are crucial to their artistic success.

On *Landmarc* (Sunnyside), Marc Mommaas uses the same instrumentation as the long-established trio of Paul Motian, Joe Lovano and Bill Frisell without aping that Mommaas-guitar grouping's signature sound. In particularly illuminating comments accompanying the CD, Mommaas states: "The concept is about independence of time, with the sole purpose of widening the gates towards a deeper form of interaction and storyline development. It is the artist's mission to develop and protect [the concept of] freedom and to express the contrasts of life."

Four of the tracks on the CD feature the basic trio: Mommaas' tenor sax, Tony Moreno's drums, and Nate Bradley's electric guitar. Three tracks add guitarist Vic Juris, while Rez Abassi's guitar or electric sitar join in on two others. Moreno, often employing brushes, is as much a probing yet elusive shadow rather than a mere time or rhythm keeper. Without a bassist, the whole concept of rhythm becomes freer and more spontaneous. As Mommaas says, interaction and storyline are at the fore, the musicians achieving a sensitive dynamic rapport led by Mommaas' emphasis on intimacy, his notes and phrases subtle breaths as much as tones, the volume turned down, fluctuating between low and whisper.

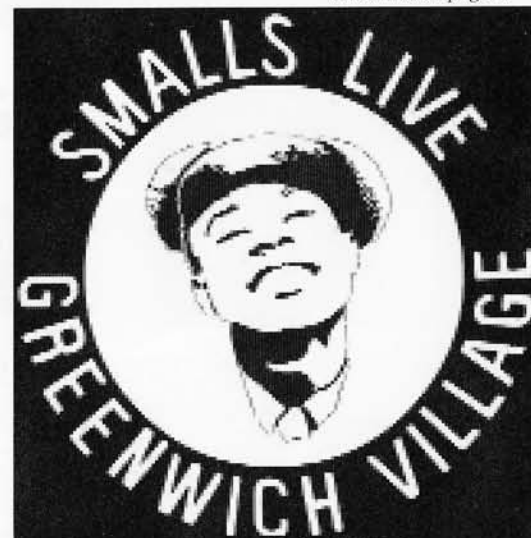
Most of the pieces (all Mommaas originals) are episodic in structure, with second strains, (quiet) shout choruses and other compositional devices breaking up the solo orders. The more complex ones recall Lennie Tristano's elaborations of standards and bebop, though they are much less rhythmically regimented. Mommaas' serpentine, legato solos conjure up memories of Warne Marsh. While the trio tracks are very fine, the quartet numbers, employing contrasting guitars - Juris' harp-like on "Folksong"; Abassi's sitar peeling pedal points on the constantly morphing "Cassavetes Caravan" - take

the music to the highest levels of engaging creativity. This is one album where repeated hearings yield new facets every time.

Brandon Wright's new *Boiling Point* (Posi-Tone) bears an apt title for a debut album that roils and roars in the post-bop/hard-bop mode. Wright boasts a brawny, coruscating tenor tone, a commendable sense of dramatic climax in his solos, and an even more admirable avoidance of clichés. He's surrounded himself with assertive sidemen: the crackling trumpet of Alex Sipiagin (on four of the eight tracks), emphatic pianist Dave Kikoski, deep-groove bassist Hans Glawischnig, and always-inventive drummer Matt Wilson, who can find new wrinkles in even the most familiar hard-bop grooves.

Wright's originals (five of the eight tunes) are more than serviceable, borrowing strategies (like forms beyond blues and AABA) from the books of Benny Golson and Wayne Shorter, and the three "standards" are diverse. "Here's That Rainy Day" is mostly a piano-sax duet with a gorgeous tenor coda; "You're My Everything"

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