



Joey Berkley: Reviews

Joey Berkley & Funkasaurus Rex: More 'n Four / Etched in Stone

Joey Berkley Quartet; Funkasaurus Rex

By Woodrow Wilkins - All About Jazz

Some jazz musicians have a knack for variety. There are those who specialize in a specific genre, but there are others who prefer to come at the listener from different directions. Saxophonist Joey Berkley is among the latter.

Berkley hails from Toronto but has made his home in New York City. In NYC, he has worked a variety of venues including The Apollo Theatre, Birdland and Radio City Music Hall. He works as a sideman, but also leads several ensembles.

Joey Berkley Quartet
More 'n Four
Mouth Piece Music
2009

Berkley's quartet is featured on *More 'n Four*, with Gary Deinstadt on piano, Joris Teepe on bass and Tony Jefferson on drums. Additional horn players are also part of the mix.

"Naked Flight," one of five original songs, has Berkley on tenor. The piece begins slowly, with the horn section softly responding to Berkley's lead. The intensity and amplification pick up a bit before the song shifts to Deinstadt's solo. Bass and drums stretch out as the piano goes through its paces. The horns come in briefly for a dramatic buildup. Jefferson adds more emphasis when Berkley takes over. The tenor goes through a frenetic series of rolls. The song becomes a free-for-all as Berkley is joined by three other sax players, each carving his own path.

"Unsung," another original, is a fast-paced tune that again highlights Berkley and Deinstadt. Jefferson's solo sets up a duet between himself and Berkley that precedes the closing sequence.

Funkasaurus Rex
Etched In Stone
Mouth Piece Music
2008

For a change of pace, Funkasaurus Rex features Berkley exclusively on tenor sax, and with a bigger band. On *Etched in Stone*, he funks up some classic soul and R&B hits.

"But It's Alright" begins the set. Seth Glassman's electric bass line is a highlight, as well as John Tropea's guitar solo. Other musicians also contribute trumpet and saxophone solos. An all-out horn section blast climaxes the song before it reverts to the primary theme.

Tropea leads the verses on the "Can't Hide Love." The horns give it an Earth Wind & Fire meets Tower of Power feel. Chris Parker's tom rolls help emphasize the bridge between chorus and verse. Bill Harris performs a David Sanborn-like alto sax solo that's punctuated heavily by bass, drums and the other horns. Chris Coogan solos on keyboard, followed by Berkley on tenor sax. After another run-through of the verse, Tropea stretches out. The rest of the band slowly transitions into the chant that closes EW&F's original recording while the guitar ad-libs.

The two releases capture two moods of Berkley: the acoustic traditionalist and the contemporary funk master.



More 'n Four

Joey Berkley | Self Produced (2009)

By Mark F. Turner - All About Jazz

A single listen to the pop/jazz standard "Nature Boy" is proof that saxophonist Joey Berkley's tenor is as robust and accomplished as they come. Living in New York since the late 1970s, the Canadian expat has survived and thrived in the "City That Never Sleeps"—performing with top musicians, running his own music company and teaching, while maintaining a couple of bands including the nine-piece jazz/funk Band, Funkasaurus Rex.

More 'n Four is a straight-ahead release—a continuation and extension of his debut quartet release, *Made in NYC* (A-Records, 1999)—that is steeped in the sounds of saxophone greats Dexter Gordon, John Coltrane and Michael Brecker, as well as younger players including Wayne Escoffery and Jerome Sabbagh. The purpose and passion is heard through Berkley's continuing artistic expression, one that balances a powerful tone with glowing lyricism.

The same treatment of "Nature Boy"—once sung by the superb crooner Nat King Cole—is present in Berkeley's reeded voice—the familiar shimmering glissando (with horn section), as the saxophonist's horn sings the gorgeous melody. Things move to full uptown swing with "Push," the momentum provided by ace rhythm section Joris Teepe (bass), Tony Jefferson (drums) and Gary Deinstadt (drums). "Naked Flight"'s modality is just as hip; a blues with street swagger.

The band shines again on another tune sung by Cole, the classic "The More I See You." The dexterity and emotion of Berkeley's solo sends shivers up and down the spine. While his soprano's tonality is not as impressive, he still has the juice on "The Alamo," but it's tunes such as "Don't Look Down" that prove his abilities as a player, writer and arranger of multiple voices and intricate rhythmic changes.

The icing on this cake is applied liberally on "Is There No Escape," where Tony Jefferson's drumming and searing tenor obliterate the heady bop tune. Berkeley is serious. Let's have more of More 'n Four.

Track listing: Nature Boy; Push; Naked Flight; Unsung; The More I See You; The Alamo; Don't Look Down; A Peace Missing; Is There No Escape?

Personnel: Joey Berkley: tenor and soprano saxophones; Gary Deinstadt: piano; Joris Teepe: bass; Tony Jefferson: drums; Lew Soloff: trumpet; Tom Christensen: tenor sax; Larry Farrell: trombone; Chris Komer: French horn; Ed Xiques: baritone sax; Loren Stillman: alto sax.



"Saxophonist Joey Berkley has got it made. With a rhythm section of pianist Darrell Grant, drummer Carl Allen and bassist Joris Teepe he can't go wrong on "Made in NYC". They bring a tight rhythmic structure that knows how to ebb, flow and get frenetic. Berkley exhibits an easy comfort with his horn and his bandmates on a set of mostly original compositions.

"All the players stretch out on a Coltranesque "Kayla" where Berkley does some of his best playing, and they're sharp and to the point on "Chango," where Allen's propulsive presence brands the tune. Teepe who also produced the CD, takes a melodic, rhythmic solo on "I'm Old Fashioned," and, with Allen, keeps a this-side-of-Latin beat on "Blessed," which opens with Berkley blowing softly and gently. Grant shows his versatility throughout. Whether trading riffs with Allen on "Dear Lili," where he gives a forceful chordal opening, or easing into and laying the foundation for "Little People," Grant always plays something you want to hear."

Jazz Times - Sunsh Stein



"...from the smooth, post-Coltrane aesthetic of Berkley's approach...the original ballad "Kayla" where the influence of Trane's ballad mode is most pronounced, as it is during the ensuing version of Jerome Kern's "I'm Old Fashioned." His band's most animated performance is during "Dear Lili" where Grant and Berkeley share lively uptempo exchanges, otherwise his best playing occurs during "Kayla," "Better Days" and the lyrical variations of "Blessed." Bass player Joris Teepe creates notable solos in "I'm Old Fashioned," "Better Days" and "Blessed" while the band's polished performance ranges from the original mambo "Chango" to the smooth, relaxed groove of the aptly named "Made in NYC."

Cadence - David Lewis



Interview with Joey in All About Jazz:

"JOEY BERKLEY is a Toronto native who moved to NYC in 1978 after graduating from Humber College. Though he's played several top Canadian events such as the duMaurier Jazz Festival in Toronto, he's been involved in the NYC music scene for many years playing clubs such as Birdland and The Squire."

GI: Can you recall the first time you were attracted to music?

JB: As a child growing up I was always around music and musicians because my mother was a singer. Through her I was exposed to the lifestyle of getting, doing and keeping "the gig" with it's ups and downs (and downs) and tried to connect that with the music she listened to- Nancy Wilson, Peggy Lee, Billie Holiday. I remember their music attracted me because it seemed so dramatic, I felt that I had to pay attention to them even if I didn't really understand it at a young age. At age 11 I took notice of the saxophone watching Boots Randolph play with the Boston Pops Orchestra on TV (Coltrane and A Love Supreme came later).

As I started to play, over the next five years or so, I began to feel that this could be my way to try and do what I heard and felt from the music my mother listened to. Thirty-one years later I'm still trying.

GI: What convinced you to become a performing artist?

JB: As I continued to play the saxophone through high-school I realized that music allowed me a catharsis to express myself. After that, being a musician was not something I chose to do as a career but rather what I had to do for life. With that comes many sacrifices that I'm sure most musicians can relate to. There are other aspects to music that I found attractive: Being able to affect a listener on a deep level (hopefully), the opportunity to be noticed and paid attention to by working hard on something that can always be better (again, hopefully), and in Jazz specifically, the spontaneous risk-taking and the immediate gratification.

GI: Would you mind revealing the elements of your 'sound'?

JB: Whether as a saxophonist or composer the main element of my "sound" would have to be a dedication to the past as the way to finding your own voice. In other words your influences are your muse and should be used. I realize that critics usually have a field-day with this screaming, "we've heard this before, and better!"

However the journey of a musician is a life time and evolution is the priority. Trying to sound like yourself is the goal but to get there I believe you must take the path of those who came before you. For me, Coltrane, Rollins, Dexter Gordon, Miles and Monk inspire me to take what they did and try and make it mine. Whatever I play or write I want my sound to have roots. As a saxophonist, I am always thinking tension and release when playing, using harmony and melody as my tools to achieve this. In continuing my development I am focusing on how to use rhythm more to help create this tension. My tone is a priority. It affects my choice of notes and how I will play them. I guess a big, dark quality is what I am going for. Somewhere between John Coltrane and Dexter Gordon.

A big tone does not mean loud, it means pure, clear and unrestricted no matter what the volume. It has less to do with mouthpiece and reed and more with what you do physically making the saxophone an extension of your body. I am always working on my embouchure and breathing as I continue to find my tone. As a writer, once I have come up with the idea and the plan to express it in a song I am careful not to over-write. I spend a lot of time un-writing to get to the essence of a song.

I do not want my songs over-arranged either. You have to leave enough room to let good musicians do their job which can be different each time we play. As an example on my CD "Made in NYC" (A-Records), Carl Allen, Darrell Grant and Joris Teepe did a great job giving my songs a personality, which I loved, within the framework I set up as composer. I have been performing live with Tony Jefferson or Steve Johns on drums both creating different ways to give the songs life along with the other musicians that play with me such as Gary Deinstadt on piano, Joris, Mike McGuirk or Bill deNeergaard on bass to name a few. I believe I do compose as a player first, always thinking of what would be fun to play.

GI: What's your most favorite food?

JB: My favorite food is all Italian. From lasagna and fettuccini to chicken marsala and shrimp scampi or just a big plate of spaghetti with a nice red sauce, give me a glass of red wine to go with it and I'm happy.

"All About Jazz" - Interviewed by Glenn M. Ito

