



Jazz CD Reviews July 2021

Jill McCarron Trio with Will Anderson Jazz Motif (Jazz Bird Records)

Jill McCarron is such a skilled and versatile jazz pianist that *Jazz Motif*, her recording debut as a leader, is long overdue. Born in Minneapolis, she grew up in Canada and graduated from Toronto's Humber College with a degree in jazz performance and arranging. The pianist moved to New York to attend the New School and has since worked with such notables as Randy Brecker, Vincent Herring, Don Braden, Jay Leonhart, and Bill Warfield's Hell Kitchen Funk Orchestra among many others.

Jazz Motif features Jill McCarron with bassist Paul Gill, drummer Andy Watson, and Will Anderson who plays two songs on alto and three on flute. The trio/quartet mostly performs lesser-known but superior pieces composed by jazz artists plus a Jobim composition and two standards that are not played all that often. In addition to the leader's consistently inventive piano solos, her arrangements for her group are colorful and consistently filled with surprises. The ensembles are tight, Gill's virtuosic solos (which are sometimes bowed) are virtuosic, and Watson's drumming is swinging and supportive.

The opener, “All God’s Chillun Got Rhythm,” begins with some sophisticated piano chords and a quick waltz transition before becoming a cooker. The rapid tempo is no problem for McCarron (whose solo includes some heated octaves), altoist Anderson, and the impressive bowed bass work of Gill. The two choruses on which the pianist and altoist solo together are one of the performance’s highlights.

John Lewis’ “Concorde” has plenty of lively counterpoint and interplay between piano, bass and Anderson on flute. The next four numbers showcase the trio. “My Ideal” is given a moody and explorative treatment with the swing era standard being creatively reharmonized. Sam Jones’ catchy “One For Amos” gives the musicians an opportunity to jam on a boppish blues while Kenny Dorham’s “Short Story” has McCarron hinting at McCoy Tyner with Gill contributing some speedy lines. Tom Scott’s “Looking Out For Number 7” is a change of pace, some high-quality groove music that finds McCarron getting funky on electric piano while still being creative.

Will Anderson’s flute adds to the Brazilian flavor of Clare Fischer’s likable “Ontem A Noite.” McCarron really swings hard on Ray Brown’s obscure but memorable “Lined With A Groove” which is very much in the tradition of the Oscar Peterson Trio. Anderson’s flute has the lead on Jobim’s “Chovendo Na Roseira” (best known as “Double Rainbow”) which receives a particularly joyful treatment. With him back on alto, Horace Silver’s “Cool Eyes” is taken on an exhilarating bebop ride; the piano solo is full of fire. After McCarron’s soulful solo rendition of Doug Riley’s “Jump For Joy” which is worthy of Keith Jarrett, the program concludes with a Bud Powell medley of “Glass Enclosure” and “Tempus Fugit.” The set closes just as it began, with inventive cooking by the leader.

Jill McCarron’s playing throughout *Jazz Motif* successfully makes the case that she is one of the top pianists in today’s jazz scene. Her enjoyable CD (available from www.jillmccarron.com) is highly recommended.