

Is This Jazz?: Greg Abate's Road To Forever



Those who've been keeping an eye on the local jazz scene for the past few decades have undoubtedly felt the presence of saxophonist Greg Abate. Between stints touring around the world, Abate has called Rhode Island home and remains a fixture in the area, leading the charge of bebop excellence around the state. His latest release, *Road To Forever*, finds the saxophonist in top form, trading fiery improvisations with a monstrous trio over expertly crafted tunes.

Backed by Tim Ray on piano, John Lockwood on bass and Mark Walker on drums, Abate effortlessly floats through a slew of originals that draw from a wide range of jazz styles. From the title track's opening Latin-infused bass line and Ray's ethereal keyboard playing to the groove of "Whaling City Sound" (dedicated to the album's label and the label's CEO Neil Weis), this album gives the band a lot of room to explore a variety of sounds. However, where this record really finds its footing is in the more bebop-focused tunes, an area where Abate is known to excel. Tracks like "Take The Crowell Train" propel forward with an ease attainable only by players who are superbly comfortable with the bebop language and know how to bend it to whatever harmonies are flying past them. Another shining moment comes from "Red Fish Boulevard" which, while only running 5:46, manages to pack in a lot of rhythmic and melodic diversity. Plus it has Abate showing off his prowess on both tenor sax and flute between letting Ray and Lockwood have a turn at the changes. Probably the most heartfelt playing is on "Farewell Phil Woods." As Abate writes in the liner notes, he wrote this song on the day of Woods' passing, citing that "it was very special knowing him and to work side by side with him and to have had the time in studio and on the bandstand with him."

Even though this album was recorded in a single session with barely any rehearsals, this quartet does an expert job of building upon the interplay between the players and allowing the improvisations to flourish. While there are some points during the album where it feels like the band has yet to truly lock in on a unified sound, the building blocks are there, and once they find their way into the pocket they're able to explore and communicate without the hinderance associated with trying to make musical relationships happen on the bandstand. These four are at the upper stratosphere of their individual abilities and combine for an album with some truly exciting moments.

Head over to gregabate.com for more information and to find out where Greg will be next.

Happening Around Town:

The John Allmark Jazz Orchestra; *First Monday monthly @ The Met (Pawtucket)*

Is This Jazz?; *First Friday, bimonthly @ AS220 (Providence) isthisjazz.tumblr.com*

Allary At Arias; *Sundays @ Arias Lounge (Providence)*

Groove Merchants; *Mondays @ Fifth Element (Newport)*

Jazz Jam; *Tuesdays @ Ten Rocks (Pawtucket)*

Groove E Tuesday; *Tuesdays @ Murphy's Law (Pawtucket)*

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