

Local World. Steve Hunter

Steve Hunter, electric bass, percussion, voice; James Muller, guitar, slide guitar; Phil Slater, trumpet; Matt McMahon, Rhodes piano, acoustic piano, melodica; Nick McBride, drums, percussion, log drums; Fabian Hevia, hand drums; Tina Harrod, voice; Bianca Rosa, Portuguese narration.

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Reviewed by David Sudmalis

Steve Hunter's *Local World* is a selection of original material composed by the eminent bass player himself featuring some of the finest Australian jazz musicians going around. As one might expect, the result is an opus of intelligent and sophisticated compositions performed with precision and vibrancy. There is a real maturity across all aspects of this disc: from the irresistible opening rhythmic workout *Kiss The Rain* to the more mellow bluesy-soul influenced *Pray* (featuring an extraordinarily moving vocal performance of Tina Harrod), there emanates a sense of timelessness and pure enjoyment as the performers are put through their collective paces.

The album shows many of Hunter's influences at work, including blues, funk, 'fusion' and world musics. What particularly appeals is the way they are brought together as a coherent musical whole in this album -- the influences are always present, but there is a real hybridisation of these styles resulting in an original compositional character that demands and equally versatile performance personality. Thankfully, the whole package is there, resulting in a disc which is a real delight.

There are a few stand out tracks on this disc for me. I particularly enjoy *Plaza Raga* with its anchored rhythmic section, its angular melodic line, its juicy and colourful comping and its considerable sense of space. This track shows the best of ensemble attributes - a real masterpiece with freedom and spontaneity yet absolutely tight, precise and controlled. The liner notes (by John Shand) warns that "...a chair with a headrest could be wise when listening to this [as] whiplash injuries are a real danger". I agree, but what a way to go! Another top shelf track is the virtuosic *Lane Four*. In this work, a simple gesture is used as the basis for development throughout the respective solos of the improvisers, with each taking the fragment in different directions: from McMahon's sizzling Rhodes solo through Hunter's exhilarating bass solo and ultimately to Slater's fabulously inventive feature. The ending of this track is a real treat, the perfect foil for such a musical explosion.

I guess the real danger in jazz of this sort is the tendency for self-indulgence and the endless parading of chops. None of this happens on this disc, which is one of the best I've been lucky to come across in some time. Top performances, sophisticated compositions, and slick production makes this disc a must.