



JAZZ

Local World
Steve Hunter
ABC Jazz

★★★★

Live
Dale Barlow
Jazzhead

★★★★

IT'S inevitable that, in a jazz scene as small and incestuous as Sydney's, bassist-bandleader Steve Hunter and tenor saxophonist-flautist Dale Barlow would have shared the same stage — and not only in their home town. Both artists are inveterate travellers. Barlow has spent much of the past two decades in London, New York and Amsterdam, working with the likes of Art Blakey, Gil Evans and fellow expatriate Mark Fitzgibbon, who plays piano and shares the front line on *Dale Barlow Live*. This recording happened overnight when Barlow flew to Melbourne, linked up with Fitzgibbon and another old colleague, bassist Matt Clohesy, who in turn introduced him to drummer Dave Beck. After less than an hour's rehearsal, the quartet headed to a club and the tape rolled. Two gigs later, there was enough for an album. It contains only five tracks, averaging 12 minutes apiece, but there is no waste, no fat. Although the record's essentially a two-

hander, the solos rarely stray into sagely nodding, leather-patched cardie-and-beret territory. Barlow's tenor is taut, expressive and muscular, honking rudely on occasion just as Fitzgibbon's keys are lyrical, structured and, well, damned polite. The rhythm section, meanwhile, provides a framework large enough to contain the primary colours, with Barlow's flute adding subtle hues of its own.

Hunter disbanded his Nine Lives project last year before travelling to Hong Kong to oversee an ambitious international collaboration. He's still thinking big on his return, putting together an all-star sextet for *Local World*, which also features singer Tina Harrod, who shines on the early Aretha-tinged *Pray (In Your Own Way)*, the only vocal track. It's the logical centrepiece, a scorching slab of soul that finds the band in exemplary ensemble mode. Elsewhere, Hunter pays homage to the golden era of jazz-rock — the late 1970s — with a Weather Report tribute, *Kiss the Rain*, and the plainly Miles-inspired *In the Blue Corner*, both of which feature award-winning trumpeter Phil Slater. He shares the honours with guitarist James Muller, keysman Matt McMahon and the percussion attack of Nick McBride and Fabian Hevia. Simply put, this and Barlow's album are proof that Australian jazz can equal the world's best.

Phil Stafford