

Benny Sharoni 'Slant Signature' (Papaya) 3/5

by ukvibe



BENNY SHARONI
SLANT SIGNATURE
FEATURING
JIM ROTONDI

Firmly routed in the tradition of many a classic Blue Note album, "Slant Signature" is Boston saxophonist Benny Sharoni's second release as a leader. Indeed, on first listen one can imagine a young Sonny Rollins blowing his horn, accompanied by the time honoured trumpeter and rhythm section. In this instance however, we are listening to a 2015 release that brings back such memories with its old-skool approach to music making. There's nothing outdated here though, far from it. Sharoni is joined by pianist Joe Barbato, bassist Todd Baker and drummer Steve Langone. Also featured are special guests Jim Rotundi on trumpet and Mike Mele on guitar. Together the band perform eight tunes with a joyful effervescence, providing us with a modern day take on a classic sound with suitable reverence to their jazz forebearers intact.

The first, and most important thing that strikes me when listening to this album is Benny Sharoni's tone. His playing is in the bebop mould of Charles McPherson or Joe Lovano, but it is his tonality that is pure gold. He truly has a wonderful sound that resonates and rings out with a quality rarely heard. Effectively blending Sharoni originals with some timeless classics, "Slant Signature" kicks off with one of the stand out tracks "Minor City", a swinging, fast flowing tune that quickly

sets the scene for what is to follow. Other gems include Lee Morgan's sumptuous "Ceora", the melodic "Subterranean Samba", and the impressive title track itself. "Bitter Drops" adds a touch of variation, featuring a quality, bluesy guitar break from Mike Mele. Throughout the recording Sharoni and trumpeter Rotundi exchange solos, with plenty of room for expression also given to pianist Barbato. In fact, I found myself wishing Sharoni had been a little more selfish in this respect, listening with anticipation for the next wonderful sax solo to enrich and delight.

The title of this release; "Slant Signature", relates to a sought after Otto Link sax mouthpiece from the 1940's. Apparently if you are lucky enough to find one of these the price tag is huge. The story goes that Sharoni came across one for ten bucks from a street vendor on Cape Cod. His good fortune is now also ours. Yet as enjoyable as this album is, I would love to hear Sharoni playing in a more adventurous, challenging setting. It will be very interesting to see how his writing develops over a period of time and hopefully we'll hear a lot more from him in the near future. As a saxophonist he certainly has the skill and flair to potentially follow in the footsteps of some of the greatest – the aforementioned Sonny Rollins and Joe Lovano being just two that spring to mind. Time will tell, as it always does.