

Gregory Tardy *Monuments*

STEEPLECHASE 31725

★★★★½

Tenor saxophonist Gregory Tardy brings smart ensemble planning and excellent writing to this muscular, soulful, celebratory album, many tracks of which give off an aura of ancient mystery, reinforced by modal scales, swirling lines and some Bible-influenced titles. Familiar through his work with Elvin Jones and the Mingus Big Band, Tardy is a dependable journeyman and team player who isn't always a scintillating storyteller as a soloist, occasionally falling back on patterns, even when he's mixing things up rhythmically. His straightforward renderings of the love songs "My Romance" (duo with bass) and "Never Let Me Go" (with trio) are heart-melters, though, particularly when he's hooting in his lower register. Other high points include his scratch-and-pop fluttering on the swinging title track and his brawny spitting and throaty cries on "Dry Seasons." Tardy uses an underpinning of bass clarinet to good effect on "Nonpersons," but his B-flat clarinet sound on "The Oil Of Gladness" is typical tenor man—rich and thick, but occasionally pinched and out of tune.

The solo highs on this album come from Tardy's bandmates, trumpeter Avishai Cohen and pianist George Colligan. Drummer Jaimeo Brown—sounding like Jeff "Tain" Watts with his powerful, relentless polyrhythms—sets the tone by providing not only the album's underly-



ing mood of intense fire but its stuttering, halting tension-and-release that involves dramatic hesitations followed by surges of energy. Unfortunately, Brown also comes through as blunt, dry and high in the mix, an unappealing sound that has been turning up on a lot on jazz recordings lately.

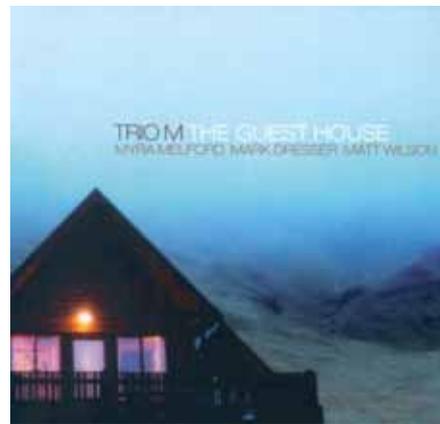
Tardy says in the notes that the centrality of rhythm to his concept comes from his time with Jones. He also notes the influence of Ali Jackson and the Marsalises. All that urgency is here, but even more welcome is Tardy's sense of optimistic belief.

—Paul de Barros

Monuments: Dust Groove; Monuments; The Oil Of Gladness; My Romance; Nonpersons; Image Of Jealousy; Dry Seasons; Never Let Me Go; Power In Weakness; The Plain-Clothed King. (62:44)

Personnel: Gregory Tardy, tenor saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet; Avishai Cohen, trumpet; George Colligan, piano; Sean Conly, bass; Jaimeo Brown, drums.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk



Trio M *The Guest House*

ENJA/YELLOW BIRD 7721

★★★★

It's a rarity to find a really democratic group, especially one that might otherwise be called a "piano trio." That denomination would suggest that Myra Melford is the leader of Trio M, but she's not; she's part of an equilateral triangle with bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Matt Wilson. They all contribute music, and they all equally steer the ship, taking turns supporting, jumping out front and working together.

Trio M is as much a piano trio as Jason Moran's Bandwagon. Which means that they can step into that storied history if they want to, but for the most part they are busy making jazz that extends the creative music lineage. Proceedings can swing nimbly, as on Dresser's "Ekoneni" (recalling Chris McGregor) and Wilson's delicate, giddy "Don Knotts," or they can open up, as on the bassist's "Tele Mojo," originally scripted for a different trio that swaps trombonist Michael Dessen for Wilson.

Dresser pushes the music further into exploratory territory than his partners tend to, which makes for a suitable balance, his yin to their yang. Melford has blossomed into such a wonderful presence, her predilection for songful melodic themes having lost some of its earlier sentimentality, yielding to an original intuition. On the title track, she rolls and tumbles over Wilson's second-line shuffle, shifting mood abruptly a couple of times, returning to an authoritative bass figure before ending with an airy coda. Her lament "Even The Birds Have Homes (To Return To)" has an Eastern European feel, melancholic, with Wilson sounding chimes and Dresser matching with arco harmonics. A more optimistic feel emerges on "Hope (For The Cause)," bassist and pianist spelling out the melody in tandem, drummer softly joining on brushes.

—John Corbett

The Guest House: The Guest House; Don Knotts; Kind Of Nine; Sat Nam; Hope (For The Cause); The Promised Land; Tele Mojo; Al; Even Birds Have Homes (To Return To); Ekoneni. (63:35)

Personnel: Myra Melford, piano; Mark Dresser, bass; Matt Wilson, drums.
Ordering info: cduniverse.com

Opus 5 *Introducing Opus 5*

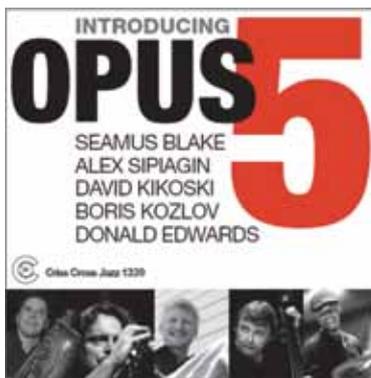
CRISS CROSS 1339

★★★★½

The concept of teamwork resounds in the debut of this new quintet. There are no stars, per se; each of the musicians—saxophonist Seamus Blake, trumpeter Alex Sipiagin, pianist David Kikoski, bassist Boris Kozlov and drummer Donald Edwards—have led bands during their careers, but are best known as consummate sidemen. Nothing wrong with that. Jazz needs chops-heavy improvisers as much as it does innovative conceptualists. The proof resides inside the subtleties of this animated mainstream date.

Their work in the Mingus Big Band has given them a chance to absorb each other's approaches. That's one of the blessings about *Introducing Opus 5*. When the group wants everything to be aligned, they have no problem doing so, and when they look for some well-designed wrinkles to provide personality, that, too is easily accomplished.

Ultimately, the writing takes a back seat to



the solos. Kikoski's "Baker's Dozen" is a riff-slanted melody with a churning rhythmic bottom. But the operatives make it something a bit more by treating it like both barnburner and rhapsody. Blake's kick-off brings aggression to the vamp. Sipiagin's follow-up injects additional bravura. Edwards tosses nuanced barbs into the

swing groove and offers an aside that points the way to dreamland.

It's Kozlov who makes the largest compositional dent, contributing a pair of tunes. His "Nostalgia In Time" references Mingus' famed 1959 sessions without aping any of the maestro's motifs. The finale, a Russian folk tune entitled "Sokol," is the program's finest piece, an 11-minute swirl that allows room for several transitions, gusts of energy and outside curves that ultimately swoop back over the plate with overt swing.

—Jim Macnie

Introducing Opus 5: Think Of Me; Tallysman; Baker's Dozen; Ton To Ton; Nostalgia In Time; Asami's Playground; Sokol. (62:35)

Personnel: Seamus Blake, tenor saxophone; Alex Sipiagin, trumpet; David Kikoski, piano; Boris Kozlov, bass; Donald Edwards, drums.
Ordering info: crisscrossjazz.com

The Hot Box

CD ▾ Critics ▶ John McDonough John Corbett Jim Macnie Paul de Barros

Dave Brubeck Quartet <i>Their Last Time Out</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★½	★★★★
Gregory Tardy <i>Monuments</i>	★★★	★★★★	★★★½	★★★½
Opus 5 <i>Introducing Opus 5</i>	★★★½	★★★½	★★★½	★★★
Trio M <i>The Guest House</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★½	★★★★

Critics' Comments

Dave Brubeck Quartet, *Their Last Time Out*

All about chemistry. The band that introduced so many of us to jazz, here in swan-song mode, playing together with joyous abandon. I like the rough recording quality, very live, which spotlights the spontaneity of this classic group. —John Corbett

It's the versatility that knocks me out about the foursome's final date. The liner notes allude to the fact that frolic was in the air because their time together was concluding. Each jaunty aside is a hoot. —Jim Macnie

Buried treasure here, with nary a sign of boredom after 10 years of playing together. Whatever the thick-gravy shortcomings of Brubeck's piano solos, there's no denying everyone came to play that last night in Pittsburgh—mischievous, joyous and totally in the moment. —Paul de Barros

Gregory Tardy, *Monuments*

The more agitated this music grows, the less interesting I find it becomes. At times hardly a note can raise its head without getting crowned with a manic cymbal smash, reminding us that there is virtuosity in restraint. So one seeks shelter in the two standards. They give Tardy space to breathe, not just blow, and escape the heaviness elsewhere. —John McDonough

Tardy's tunes, Colligan's fine playing and a considered program tip this from a solid straight-ahead date to something more fun. The pianist and saxophonist have an electrifying connection; Tardy's explosive, hard-toned saxophone and Colligan's probing, urgent comping mix a mighty potent cocktail. Cohen's killer, as always, and Brown, new to me, is a powerful, limber agitator. —John Corbett

Love the aggression that Team Tardy brings to the table on this one. They filter a hard-bop stance through a modern lens and assure animation at every turn. If you don't like the title cut, you don't like jazz. —Jim Macnie

Opus 5, *Introducing Opus 5*

"Introducing" hardly describes these old hands, who've logged a collective 350-plus sessions over 30 years. But the high octane of energy and musicianship fails to translate into a quintet of any pointedly distinctive elements. Within its genre, though, it navigates its self-inflicted challenges with a poised and secure assurance. —John McDonough

Well-constructed mainstream play with no sharp edges. On either horn, Sipiagin has a soft sound, supplemented by Blake's gentility. Requisite r&b flavorings, both rhythmic ("Baker's Dozen," odd meter with light backbeat) and sonic (Kikoski's super clean Rhodes), and hard-bop stock designed for a fivesome ("Tallysman," the bassist's lovely "Nostalgia In Time"). The adapted folk song is a nice twist—unexpected, sweet, climactic, right. —John Corbett

Opus 5's solid forward thrust and sizzling multiple threads should make this Blakey-and-beyond quintet more compelling than it is, but there's some magic missing here—in both the material and the solos. That said, Sipiagin's trumpet on the smartly chosen George Cables opener, "Think Of Me," and ex-Vancouver tenor ace Seamus Blake's singing solo on the ballad "Asami's Playland" are memorable. —Paul de Barros

Trio M, *The Guest House*

The cover art may suggest *The Summer Of '42*, but the music inside bends sentiment through the downtown lens of a lyrical surrealism that is bracing and invigorating without being annoying. Airy lyricism mingles with foreboding ambivalence seasoned with tangled swirls of Cecil Taylor-esque scribbles. An accessible but adventurous fling. —John McDonough

They've always been tight, but this disc finds them bring the interaction to a superb level—a place where they're guessing each other's gambits and sharing the heavy lifting on an impressive level. —Jim Macnie

Myra Melford seamlessly traces the intersection of concrete and abstract, inside and "out," managing somehow to play the piano as both a percussion instrument and a lyrical vehicle for melody. "Al," for Albert Ayler, is one of the sweetest tributes ever. —Paul de Barros



AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 14th

GREGORY PORTER
BE GOOD

GREGORY PORTER
BE GOOD DIGITAL SINGLE
AVAILABLE NOW

PORTER FOLLOWS UP HIS EXTRAORDINARY GRAMMY®-NOMINATED DEBUT, WATER (JAZZWISE #1 ALBUM OF THE YEAR AND BEST JAZZ VOCAL ALBUM; L'ACADEMIE DU JAZZ)

"EVERY BIT AS HOT AS HIS DEBUT"

ALSO ON MOTÉMA



DENNIS ROLLINS VELOCITY TRIO THE 11th GATE

"★★★★★ Treat yourself to it."

—BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE

MUSIC ON THE RISE. motéma

GET FREE MUSIC MONTHLY. JOIN THE E-MAIL LIST AT MOTELMA.COM