

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Erik Telford – Kinetic - 3 stars (January 22, 2010)

Austin, Texas, is perhaps best known as the home of the annual SXSW music industry feeding frenzy, but trumpeter Erik Telford is up to something entirely different within the environs of his adopted hometown. A seasoned sideman who has served with the likes of Joshua Redman, Wynton Marsalis, Jon Faddis and Louie Bellson, as bandleader, Telford is clearly interested in rescuing what has come to be called "fusion" from the scrap-heap of history.

He's a student of Miles Davis' work circa 1967-74, a time when Davis largely abandoned complex harmony in favor of modal excursions and eminently funky, mantra-like grooves. Calling this "fusion" is like calling "Strawberry Fields Forever" or David Bowie's "Low" rock -- it just doesn't quite cut it. There's more going on than such a sobriquet implies.

Rather than attempt to re-create Davis' "Aghartha," however, Telford brings his own twist to the tale on "Kinetic," by blending straight-up funk workouts ("Horizon Problem") with sparse, lyrical ballads ("Rosemary") and tunes that blend well-arranged horn charts with a loose, swanky "jam-band" feel.

None of this feels at all contrived, particularly when Telford's lithe ensemble -- sax/clarinet man Matthew Maley and trombonist Ulrican Williams are particularly inspired when they take the spotlight -- grabs ahold of "Kinetic's" standout track, the elegantly unfolding modal piece "The Rival." With this song, Telford enters the world conjured by Joe Zawinul's epic "Brown Street." In fact, "The Rival" is much more "Nefertiti" than it is "On the Corner" -- this is not pointless meandering or musician-centric noodling, but rather, a taut, coiled, smart composition.

Telford is bridging gaps here, connecting a rich and oft- undervalued era of improvisational music with present-day jam and "post-rock" trends. An exciting album, this one.

- Jeff Miers

Bookings

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