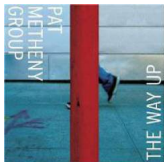


Pat Metheny Group - The Way Up (2005)

Written by bluesever

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1.Opening 2.Part One 3.Part Two 4.Part Three Pat Metheny (acoustic, electric, synth and slide guitars) Lyle Mays (acoustic piano, keyboards) Steve Rodby (acoustic and electric basses, cellos) Cuong Vu (trumpet, voice) Gregoire Maret (harmonica) Antonio Sanchez (drums) + Richard Bona (percussion, voice) Dave Samuels (percussion)

The Way Up is the Pat Metheny Group's debut offering for Nonesuch Records. Comprised of a single, sprawling, 68-minute composition by Metheny and Lyle Mays -- divided into four sections on CD -- it is an unprecedented new direction for the band. The lineup is the same as on *Speak of Now* from 2003 -- Metheny and Mays on keyboards, bassist Steve Rodby, drummer Antonio Sánchez, and trumpeter/vocalist Cuong Vu. New to the roster is Swiss/American harmonicist Gregoire Maret. While the sound here is instantly recognizable as PMG, it is dazzling and labyrinthine in shape, sound, and texture. Painstakingly composed, *The Way Up* also offers large open sections for solo improvisation and group interplay. The work's theme is stated in part one, unfolding gradually as skeletal layered guitars, samples, and other gentle electronics ease the frame into view, Sánchez's drumming creating an insistent pulse. Mays' piano and Metheny's guitar engage in contrapuntal arpeggios and Vu enters haltingly with the actual line before the ensemble engages it as a whole. Brief melodic interludes usher in the longish second section seamlessly, where lyric fragments become full-blown statements, as the band's trademark restrained dynamic slips in unobtrusively before erupting into sheer euphoria with layered, crunchy, and fat six-strings, lilting harmonicas, and trumpets in tandem, all buoyed by Mays and Rodby, who underscore Sánchez's skittering cymbal dance. As it progresses, the band takes more chances, walking out onto a ledge and simply jumping off -- while never losing the deep, lush lyricism inherent in the composition's body. The thematic body and the hook at its core are infectious. These, too, open inwardly to an entirely new set of musical ideas in the middle of the section that changes no less than three times in its 26-minute duration. Mays' piano, an acoustic guitar, and Rodby's fretless bass tiptoe ghostlike into part three before Vu once more shimmers and spatters colorful notes across the top in a hush before allowing Maret to bring the entire line into being. Spare, careful, and emotionally moving, it builds until the entire band gels and cracks it into a breezy elegant walk through airy harmonics and slippery rhythms before notions of counterpoint, dense syncopated rhythmic figures (à la Steve Reich),

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and tight, tense dynamics segue into the final section. Here is where all previous elements come together into a swinging whole. Fueled by Mays' ostinato in the intro, Metheny's soloing winds around the outside, punctuating and stretching it as electronics paint the backdrop. The band locks into the groove before Maret and Vu add banners of expressionistic color. The Way Up feels more like a jazz concerto than anything else. If anything, it may actually be the record Metheny and Mays have been trying to make for over two decades. It is the place between the cracks, where defined genres disappear into a poetic whole and what emerges is something utterly new, guided and inspired by the limitless creativity of the jazz tradition. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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