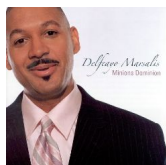


Delfeayo Marsalis - Minions Dominion (2006)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 13 September 2018 11:49 -

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1 *Brer Rabbit* 2 *Lone Warrior* 3 *If Only You Knew* 4 *Minions Dominion* 5 *Just Squeeze Me*
6 *Weaver Of Dreams* 7 *Lost In The Crescent* Delfeayo Marsalis - trombone Donald Harrison
- alto saxophone Branford Marsalis - tenor and soprano saxophones Mulgrew Miller - piano
Sergio Salvatore - piano Robert Hurst III - bass Edwin Livingston - bass Eric Revis - bass
Elvin Jones - drums

What does the term "mainstream" mean to you? In jazz, the label is applied to music which has time-tested, codified rhythm and structure. After that, it can get more mainstream if the melody and harmony are easily understood. This is not a value judgment about good or bad music, but rather a way of placing the music within a framework of expectation. However, that expectation can be quite different depending on one's individual experience and personality.

Some listeners enjoy having such expectations fulfilled, while others revel in being set up and fooled. Many people with wide listening habits are on the lookout for music that manages to hold together without doing the expected, and actually relish feeling the musical ground constantly shifting under their feet.

Trombonist Delfeayo Marsalis' *Minions Dominion* is absolute dead-center mainstream music for people who like well-played jazz that is just thorny enough to elicit a smile (or grimace, as the case may be). However, this music will not have that "sound of surprise" enjoyed by more adventurous listeners, which draws them to jazz in the first place. They will be able to pull out Blue Note reissues that have almost the same feel.

Moreover, mainstream does not have to mean music which sounds old. Two recent, and quite

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different, albums, David Braid's Zhen and Andrew Rathbun's Shadow Forms, both sit in the mainstream camp, but they also bend the rules and thwart expectations enough to be quite surprising and memorable.

The liner notes for Minions Dominion actually anticipate this whole issue. The 2002 session is special in that it was the great Elvin Jones' last studio session. Marsalis had an ongoing apprenticeship with the drummer, and at one point asked him whether his playing would benefit from "less tradition and more avant-garde?" Some might think that asking such a question might indicate that Marsalis was missing the point. You cannot just decide to "play avant-garde." A real avant-garde player feels that style as deeply within himself as does the traditional player his own. Jones, perhaps sensing this whole conundrum, and being a trailblazer himself, answered perfectly, saying that if Marsalis continued studying and playing, in a few years he should "understand the tradition well enough that you can take it into whatever direction you'd like."

Given all of this philosophy, the record does swing like hell—in the expected way for sure, but it is nonetheless very deep and irresistible. The bass players, Robert Hurst III and Edwin Livingston, along with Jones (of course) should get much of the credit for this.

Also, pianist Mulgrew Miller, as a member of the rhythm section, plays in a very wide and deep pocket; there is no question of his feel for this style. He also plays outstanding accompaniment: one can hear him listening to and echoing the soloists, providing just the right touch whenever he plays.

Jones himself is in fine form and in general pushes the proceedings, adding intensity to the session, including the famous polyrhythms of his John Coltrane years' lore, as in the evocative "Lone Warrior." He can also just flat out swing as in "Brer Rabbit," which is a good track to show why this record falls flat. The bass starts the tune with a walking line that sounds at first like an ear-catching mistake but is not, but then the piano has trouble synching up with him, as do the drums with the other two. Eventually, they all get hooked up and build a head of steam, but this beginning screams "studio recording," with the musicians interacting through headphones and not by really being there.

Saxophonists Branford Marsalis and Donald Harrison provide most of the fireworks, which to these ears sound forced within the context of the rest of the playing and could almost be the expected "avant-ness."

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The leader's trombone tone is quite clean, warm and inviting. He certainly likes to throw a quote in during his soloing, but it is not subtle at all. The high point of the record for me is his sumptuous playing on the ballad "If You Only Knew."

All in all, the music sounds trapped in the past, especially "Lost In The Crescent," which just reeks of the Marsalis jazz-through-slavery prism refracted through Coltrane. ---Budd Kopman, allaboutjazz.com

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