

The Classical Jazz Quartet - Play Rachmaninov (2006)

Written by bluesever

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Piano Concerto #2 In C Minor 1 Movement I – Part I 0:54 2 Movement I – Part II 8:44 3
Movement I – Part III 6:41 4 Movement I – Part IV 4:09 5 Movement II – Part V 4:47 6
Movement II – Part I 5:55 7 Movement II – Part II – Cadenza Version 5:38 8 Movement III –
Part I 6:12 9 Movement III – Part II 6:09 Bass – Ron Carter
Drums – Lewis Nash Piano – Kenny Barron Vibraphone, Marimba – Stefon Harris

Playing jazz versions of classical compositions has a long history that goes back even before jazz had a name -- when the procedure was called "ragging the classics." And, at that time, Rachmaninov would have been prime fodder for such treatment: his memorable, self-contained melodies and uncomplicated structures just needed the spice of African-American rhythms to cross the genre boundary. Jazz treatments of classical music reached a high-water mark in popularity with the Bach recordings of the Modern Jazz Quartet in the 1950s, but then declined as more confrontational ideologies came to the fore in jazz (although even then interchanges among avant-garde musicians were frequent). Various revivals of the idea have bubbled up in recent years, and the Classical Jazz Quartet -- Kenny Barron on piano, Ron Carter on bass, Stefon Harris on vibraphone and marimba, and Lewis Nash on drums -- now has hit on the unique insight that Rachmaninov can stand up to more modern treatment as well. The entire disc is based on Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C sharp minor, whose three movements are broken up into thematic sections, each of which serves as a basis for mainstream, post-bop modern jazz improvisations. Rachmaninov works as well for this purpose as would popular song melodies (for several of which his music served as the source anyhow). Barron and Carter are renowned jazz players, and they deliver exciting performances; Carter provides the rhythmic drive that's necessary to carry this kind of project off, and Barron nods entertainingly toward the source material with passages of even, nonsyncopated rhythms. This is a jazz disc rather than a performance of Rachmaninov, and it's an expert, sophisticated one even if it merely revives a jazz tradition rather than breaking new ground in inter-genre dialogue. ---James Manheim, AllMusic Review

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