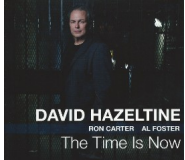


David Hazeltine - The Time Is Now (2018)

Written by bluesever
Monday, 15 July 2019 14:48 -

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1 *The Time Is Now* 2 *The Odd Couple* 3 *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes* 4 *Cabin In The Sky* 5 *Blues For Eddie* 6 *Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight* 7 *When I'm Here With You* 8 *The Parlayer* 9 *In A Sentimental Mood* 10 *Muse Of Montgomery* 11 *Signals* Bass – Ron Carter Drums – Al Foster Piano – David Hazeltine

David Hazeltine's thirty-fourth date as a leader juxtaposes his strengths as a composer, interpreter of standard material, improviser, as well as the capacity to converse and interact with his peers. There's something magical about the ways in which the pianist employs these skills, avoiding emphasizing one at the expense of the others, and in doing so fashioning tracks that are balanced, agreeable, incisive, and substantive. It's fascinating to consistently hear him chart a middle course, melding emotion and intellect while deftly combining suave phrases and rapid flights, and offering a steady steam of ideas without overloading the music or sounding labored.

The *The Time Is Now* documents Hazeltine's ongoing musical relationship with the legendary jazzmen, bassist Ron Carter and drummer Al Foster, whose performances on the record match their reputations. Carter's and Foster's efforts combine stability, an openness to all possibilities, and the distinct impression that the experiences inherent in decades of making creative music are actively being put into play.

The leader's interpretative range of songs by celebrated tunesmiths is impressive. He transforms the jaunty optimism of Neal Hefti's "The Odd Couple" into something sparse, wistful and somewhat cautious. Buoyed by Foster's Afro-Cuban beats, a breezy, elegant, optimistic Latin treatment of Jerome Kern's "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" is irresistible, practically lifting you out onto the dance floor. For those who assumed they'd never hear another genuinely inspired version of Duke Ellington's "In A Sentimental Mood," here it is. Hazeltine's shifts in texture, dynamics and emphasis, as well as briefly holding back a note or two and then inserting them in

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unexpected places, creates a small, understated sense of drama.

All of Hazeltine's six compositions stand up nicely on their own as well as making good matches with the non-original material. One in particular, "The Parlayer," is the latest in a long line of his tunes ("Pearls," featured on Michael Dease's recent Posi-Tone Records release Bonafide is another good example) that feel like a briskly evolving series of riddles, filled with fluctuations, pauses, and genial phrases, all wrapped in a loose bundle. It's a genuine pleasure to hear the ease in which he unites several brief themes and gleefully swings all the while.

Hazeltine's improvisations evince a wide palette within a relatively conventional (think of mid-to-late twentieth century jazz piano styles with an emphasis on bebop), briskly swinging context. Regardless of where he goes, the trio always remains a cohesive unit. Throughout "Blues For Eddie" and "The Parlayer" he's in a continuous state of evolution, yet the music doesn't come off as particularly busy or demanding. A laser-like intensity always morphs into something more genial and measured. During "Cabin In The Sky," "Muse Of Montgomery," and "Signals," single note runs scamper about, almost out of Carter's and Foster's grasp, only to suddenly land in a common, communal space.

The Time Is Now reaffirms Hazeltine's stature as a wise, articulate and energetic piano stylist. Highly recommended. ---David A. Orthmann, allaboutjazz.com

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