

Eric Nemeyer's

Jazz Inside

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The Mind, Body & Spirit of Jazz In New York & Way Beyond

When did this become perfectly acceptable, even among highly schooled singers?) But that's a minor quibble. Berkson's is a unique yet universal musical voice that's off to a marvelous start. It'll be intriguing to see where she takes it in the coming years.



WILLIE JONES III

THE NEXT PHASE—Produced by Willie Jones III. *The Thorn; Changing the Game; Melancholy Mind; Family; Kosin Rufu; Another Time; Until It's Time for You to Go; Up the Middle.*

PERSONNEL: Willie Jones III, drums; Eric Reed, piano; Dezron Douglas, bass; Warren Wolf, vibes; Greg Tardy, sax; Steve Davis, trombone; Claudia Acuna, Renee Neufille, vocals.

By Dave Miele

The Next Phase is the fourth release from drummer Willie Jones III. A native of Los Angeles California, Jones' accomplishments (aside from his CDs

as a leader) include the formation of the jazz band Black Note, a West Coast bop-influenced band that was awarded first place in the John Coltrane Young Artist Competition in 1991, and work with such jazz luminaries as Milt Jackson and Arturo Sandoval. Jones is a drummer, composer and bandleader of supreme individuality and uniqueness. *The Next Phase* is a straight-ahead jazz CD, filled with compelling tunes written by several members of the band.

Two tunes were contributed by pianist Eric Reed. The first of these, "The Thorn," opens the disc. This tune is built on a piano/bass vamp with a hard-bop flavored horn melody and a mix of Latin and swing feels that instantly brings to mind the stylings of McCoy Tyner, an obvious influence on Reed. In addition to fine trombone, vibes and piano solos, the tune is rounded out by some intense drums over the introductory vamp, before the melody returns. "An-

other Time" again shows Reed's affection for Tyner, with a mix of Latin and swing feels. One of the most interesting aspects of this tune are the hits that happen after the main melody and between solos.

Willie Jones' original tune is entitled "Changing the Game." It's a light, medium-up tempo swing tune, on which the leader plays brushes. The melody is doubled by the horns and vibes. This is an energetic tune, despite its laid back sensibilities. From bassist Dezron Douglas comes "Kosin Rufu," a gentle waltz which serves as a vibes/piano feature. The final tune written by a band member is trombonist Steve Davis' "Up the Middle." This is another Latin/swing number with a straight-ahead feel. Davis does a particularly fine job soloing on his own composition.

Other tunes include two vocal selections. "Melancholy Mind" features the vocals of Claudia Acuna and is set in a light Latin style. "Until It's Time for You to Go" is a more traditional ballad, featuring vocalist Renee Neufille and saxophonist Greg Tardy Tenor. One of my personal favorites is "Family," which begins with a syncopated bass vamp on one note, before Eric Reed joins in with a melody over the top, followed by the full horn melody. The tune has a restrained but busy swing feel.

Willie Jones III has shown great skill in assembling a top-notch band that shares his musical sensibilities. Together these men and women make a wonderful sound. The style is rooted in hard bop traditions, peppered with the unique individuality of each band member. I will certainly be following Willie Jones III through *The Next Phase* and the next one and the next one...