

Chris Parker

Reviews

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This crew does themselves a disservice with the goofy name that's probably an inside joke because it hides the fact that this group would probably cost more than Aerosmith to have them play at your kid's bar mitzvah. Session heavies Will Lee, Ralph MacDonald, Chris Parker, Clifford Carter and David Mann have about a million years of experience and a million resume credits and a million gold records hanging on their walls and they still know how to jam and have fun after all this time. Fusing every kind of jazz with everything else that swings, this set is a wake up call for people that like good music without labels. Hot stuff.

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CD Reviews: Toph-E and the Pussycats -- No Ordinary Day by Frank Etier -- Technorati

The Pussycats are actually "cool cats" and cast significant individual feline shadows. Collectively, they cast an imposing shadow in which many artists would be honored to stand. These guys have been together for ten years and share a common interest in rhythm and blues - jazzed up R & B.

No Ordinary Day is their latest studio album and represents their typical repertoire, a mix of their own compositions, contemporary favorites, and jazz standards (Miles, Monk, Hancock, and Duke Ellington). In this case, their chosen standard is the classic, "Maiden Voyage" by Herbie Hancock, which gets a Latin treatment. Also included is their cover of an early 80's song that was popular with the Portuguese, "Of Everything I Know", a crowd pleaser in Pussycat live performances.

The title track, "No Ordinary Day" is a Lee/Mann composition inspired by love. Says Lee, "We've seen couples leave the venue after hearing this song, only to return an hour later and request it again..." This reviewer played it last night and my wife was certainly influenced!

In addition to their cover of Hancock's classic, my personal favorite is the opening track, "Pussyfoot", another Lee/Mann composition. Lee says this piece was inspired by one their favorite groups, Fourplay, and the cats don't pussyfoot around with it. It's an appropriate example of why no guitar is included in the quintet - more room for solos and interaction from the rhythm section. (Horace Silver and Thelonious Monk made the same choice with their groups.)

Toph-E and The Pussycats is made up of Chris Parker on drums, Will Lee on bass and vocals, Ralph MacDonald percussionist, Clifford Carter on piano and keyboards, and finally

David Mann on saxophone. The list of collaborations is long and impressive, from Sinatra and Dylan to James Taylor, James Brown, Queen Latifah, and Sting, just to name a minute few.

It is noteworthy to mention that Ralph MacDonald started with Harry Belafonte and went on to write Grammy-winning hits for other artists: "Just the Two of Us", "Where is the Love", and "Mister Magic" - all crowd pleasers in live performances.

Slip No Ordinary Day into the CD player, uncork a bottle of wine, and you'll find out where the love is! Release date is October 26, 2010 and it's available at Amazon, iTunes, and CDBaby now.

**CD Reviews: Toph-E and the Pussycats -- No Ordinary Day
A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by Mark S. Tucker**

Okay, weird damned name, I hafta admit, but not at all indicative of what they create. In point of fact, though, I never expected to see these guys together in one band. Nonetheless, they've been at it for a full decade, and this CD is witness to what a great combination the ensemble is. Composed of cats who have chiefly been esteemed as sessioneers since approximately the Cretaceous, boasting a credit list of sit-ins that would choke even Tony Levin, the ultra professional work of Ralph MacDonald (perc.), Chris Parker (drums), Will Lee (bass), David Mann (saxes), and Cliff Carter (keys) provides a dozen cuts bringing to mind the old Larsen-Feiten Band, echoes of the Crusaders by way of Chuck Mangione, and any number of silky-smooth mood masters.

No Ordinary Day is largely instrumental and could not have come a moment too soon. In an era of increasing stress and anxiety, this is sonic tonic while also a great showcase of oases of ready-steady improv and stylish rhythm sectioning. Even when waxing boppy, there's a satiny finish to everything, such that I would not have been at all displeased to see these bad boys of the down-low open for Sade. The title cut is particularly moody but oh so refreshing for it, and when Mann doubles up on himself, the effect is like cool water.

It's not hard to discern why Miles, Mick Jagger, Steely Dan, Frank Sinatra, Bryan Ferry, George Benson, and a staggering array of top-flight artists have chosen all members of this band for session work; their chops are of the finest vintage. I very fondly recall when MacDonald was off playing beside John Tropea when I was but a young lad picking up sides from CTI, Kudu, Blue Note, and various other funky mello-groove merchants, and the guy, famed then, has gotten nothing but better, as have they all. Pick up this dulcet diamond when the world has finally gotten on your last nerve and you need a creative soma to drive away woe and worry—in other words: tomorrow.

"Corrective stockings and liniment never held back a real groupie. Toph-E sounds like no other. So many groups have that Spinach in the Teeth sound. Toph-E is flossed, fresh. Simultaneously Blithe and committed. A shifting of elevation with deft changes of direction; like a pigeon trapped in an arena. It's thrilling to see you make that exit through the roof. A few

barrel rolls, then up, up to a bird-y perch, to contemplate the universe.
Good stuff; may I please have more?

Uncle Buster (William Eaton)

live real time review from a Toph-E and the Pussycats performance at The CanalRoom,
January 21st, 2010.

Toph-E and The Pussycats Live In Detroit (M'Bubba Music 1001)

Lively and hugely entertaining, this band plays vibrant music that draws on RnB, bop and a few other linked genres along the way. The New York-based band's repertoire on this live date is mainly originals but there is also Miles Davis's 'All Blues' and Duke Ellington and Harry Carney's 'Rockin' In Rhythm'. The musicians involved are Chris Parker (drums), Will Lee (bass, vocals), Ralph MacDonald (percussion), Clifford Carter (piano, keyboards) and David Mann (tenor and soprano saxophones). The band has been in existence since 2000 and has developed considerable rapport. This, allied to the obvious love they have for the music they play makes for an exciting and thoroughly enjoyable CD that should appeal to many.
Swing2bop.com

We are treated to a rollicking sojourn of tight swinging jazz, plus the frosting: Some taut vocal harmony by Will Lee on vocals with his (I will have to assume) digital vocal assist by machine. Trust me when I say that this prior statement isn't offered to lessen the impact of this fine project. Leader Chris Parker as his own liner notes so aptly state: "Take no prisoners in Motown."

George W. Carroll/The Musicians' Ombudsman

Posted by: admin on Monday, February 12, 2007 - 02:52 PM
www.ejazznews.com

CD Reviews: Toph-E and The Pussycats Live in Detroit

Posted by: editor on Sunday, February 25, 2007 - 03:26 PM

Glenn Astarita
www.ejazznews.com

This outing is largely about a group of revered session musicians letting their hair down in front of a live audience recorded at the Detroit International Jazz Festival. Here, bassist/vocalist Will Lee, keyboardist Clifford Carter and three other luminaries reaffirm their spunkier musicality. The pulsating string of events feature a conglomerate of in-the-pocket grooves, often spiced with percussionist Ralph MacDonald's Afro-Cuban accents and more! In effect, the quintet heralds a Motown-jazz schema via its upbeat and contemporary-minded spins on Duke Ellington's toe-tapping Rockin' in Rhythm, and Bill Withers' pop hit, Just the Two of Us. And when you add soul-drenched and fiery solos by saxophonist David Mann, the ensemble stirs up some heated momentum in numerous spots.

Drummer, leader and founder Chris Parker renders a frothy bottom end for his band-mates' driving choruses fueled with turbo-mode, RnB-fused jazz and radiantly pronounced funk.

More importantly, this album exemplifies the aura of a given band operating at the top of its game. Hence, the live element is duly communicated, throughout the preponderance of this indubitably persuasive endeavor.

CD Reviews: Toph-E And The Pussycats.. Live In Detroit...Wax Music 2006

Posted by: adminon Wednesday, May 31, 2006 - 09:00 AM

By John Gilbert

This album was recorded live at the Detroit International Jazz Festival, featuring a group that scorches wax to the max as evidenced in Duke's "Rockin' In Rhythm" is joyfully romped through with Clifford Cater's burning piano solo leading the way.

There are 8 tracks on this CD and every one of them swings in high hip fashion.

4 Stars

Toph-E and the Pussycats "Live in Detroit"

Review by Brad Walseth
www.jazzchicago.net

Something funky this way comes. Recorded at the 2004 Detroit International Jazz Festival, this album features the NYC super-group performing a crowd-pleasing live set. Toph-E is drummer Chris Parker, and the Pussycats are keyboardist Clifford Carter, bassist Will Lee, percussionist Ralph MacDonald and saxophonist David Mann. The Chicago-born Parker has played drums with everyone from Paul Butterfield to Paul Simon, including Aretha Franklin, James Brown, the Brecker Brothers and Miles Davis; while first-call bassist Will Lee has played with a similarly wide ranging cast of artists (including Frank Sinatra), but may be best known as an original member of the David Letterman Late Night house band. David Mann was lead tenor for Tower of Power and has played with people like Luther Vandross, Pat Metheny, and Bob James; while Carter has played keyboards with James Taylor, Natalie Cole, Michael Franks and Herbie Mann. And of course, Ralph MacDonald has played too many sessions to count and may be the best known percussionist in the world today. These are some heavy (Pussy) cats, indeed.

With an all-star cast like this, one can hardly go wrong, and the song choices are strong as well. This joyful set blends elements of RnB, Jazz, Soul and Funk and runs from the Duke Ellington opener - "Rockin in Rhythm" (with a killer soprano sax solo by Mann) through to a wonderful encore of Ralph MacDonald's "Mister Magic" (made famous by Grover Washington, Jr.). In between there is a steamy Parker original - "Minky, Don't You Weep" with Parker's intense drumming and Macdonald setting his congas on fire. On this song, as on the others, the interplay between the rhythm section members is stellar. "Tee" - a tribute to the late great pianist Richard Tee follows - with Carter channeling the gospel-inspired style of the big man over Lee's warm bass tones.

A charming cover of Macdonald's "Just the Two of Us" - a big hit for Grover Washington Jr., and co-writer (along with William Salter) Bill Withers is a welcome inclusion; while the brilliant keyboardist Don Grolnick (Dreams, Brecker Brothers, etc...) - whose life ended much too early due to non-Hodgkins lymphoma - is given his due on his intensely driving "Human Bites." With jazz funk credentials such as these, as can be imagined, the playing by all members is first rate, and here, as throughout, the rhythm section is masterful in allowing space for Carter and Mann to solo. Meanwhile Miles Davis is given a reggae-treatment on "All Blues" where Lee takes a delightful solo turn in the spotlight.

Perhaps the highpoint of the recording however, is the high-powered, anti-war version of Gene McDaniels' Eddie Harris/Les McCann soul classic - "Compared to What" that had the audience dancing wildly and gleefully shouting along. A fine live recording of a group of top-flight musicians playing the music they love for an appreciative audience in the Motor City, "Live in Detroit" is a true pleasure for fans of funky, soulful RnB flavored jazz.

Toph-e & the PussyCats is made up of drummer Chris Parker, bassist Will Lee, keyboardist Clifford Carter, percussionist Ralph MacDonald and saxophonist David Mann.

Live in Detroit starts with a funky spin of "Rockin' in Rhythm" by Duke Ellington.

The cut shows the tenacity with which these seasoned veterans perform. Parker and Lee are the pinnacle of a rhythm section, and Mann is one of the most exciting sax men I have heard in some time. His movement on the changes in the opening cut shows why he is one of the best.

This follows with a Parker original, "Minky, Don't You Weep", and one by the late Richard Tee called simply, "Tee". Lee takes over the reins on vocals with a classy version of Bill Withers' "Just the Two of Us". MacDonald and Carter are upfront in every selection, with MacDonald decorating each composition and Carter playing some of the kindest changes.

The CD kicks it up with "Human Bites", a Don Grolnick tune and the 'Cats let it rip.

Miles Davis' "All Blues" adds to the stretch-out session and "Compared to What" and "Mister Magic" wrap things up.

Toph-e & the PussyCats are performing in and around New York City. Do not miss the opportunity to see them live!

To purchase this recording, contact Chris Parker at www.chrisparkerdrums.com or go to CDBaby.com

James Rosen