

JAZZBEAT

Pete Mills: Music on a 'high level'

Performer receiving critical acclaim for compositions

BY MATT WARNER
For the Dayton Daily News

Pete Mills has worked hard to become one of the region's most respected saxophonists. His new CD, however, highlights his abilities as a composer.

Composition, Mills says, "is an important part of developing your own voice." The title of his new album, *Art and Architecture*, hints at Mills' view of jazz as a serious artistic medium worthy of a thoughtful approach.

"I was very focused for almost a year," Mills says of his preparation for the recording. "I worked and prepared and practiced, and then just tried to be in the moment."

The moment came in June 2003, when Mills rolled tape at a studio in Brooklyn. Armed with seven of his own original compositions, a strong supporting cast and the energizing buzz of being in New York, Mills produced a strong effort that critics and jazz fans have noticed.

Since its release in August, *Art and Architecture* has received extensive radio play. Legendary saxophonist Jimmy Heath gave it "six stars," and was especially impressed with Mills' compositions.

"I appreciate all of the positive responses," Mills says. "I was amazed at how well the guys played, but also at how interested they were in my music."

The musicians Mills' hand-picked for the recording did exactly what he hoped they would — weld their creative



SAXOPHONIST PETE MILLS released a new recording featuring his original compositions, 'Art and Architecture,' in August.

forces with his own.

The foundation came from Dennis Irwin's "rock-solid" bass playing. Matt Wilson added the "energy, excitement, and a little wackiness" that Mills was looking for at drums. Mills says he "relishes every opportunity" to play with pianist Bobby Floyd, a fellow Columbus musician.

Guitarist Pete McCann provides the icing on this CD. Mills has long admired McCann, and appreciates his "ability to be versatile."

McCann, who has appeared on dozens of records as a leader and sideman, expertly conformed his style to each of Mills' compositions. McCann's solo on *Dot Com* falls somewhere between Mike Stern and John Scofield, while his work on *Pumpkin Shoes* has a Pat Metheny vibe.

Mills' playing shines on his *April Time* and the ballad *Chelsea Bridge*, by Ellington collaborator and Dayton native Billy Strayhorn. His tenor sax tone is strong but not overbearing, and his technique secure and agile. His improvisations incorporate traditional, contemporary and unique ideas.

In addition to serving as an artistic signature, Mills hopes that *Art and Architecture* will create more live performance opportunities, in Columbus and beyond.

He is officially kicking off the release of the new CD with a series of concerts throughout Ohio this week, including this Saturday at Pacchia.

McCann will come from New York to join Mills this week. Also with him at Pacchia will be drummer Jim Rupp and bassist Doug Richeson.

"It will be music on a pretty high level, that is both exciting and entertaining," Mills says. "I'm glad to have the opportunity to get my music out there."

Whether it's in the form of composition or improvisation, Mills has a voice that should be heard.

► **Pete Mills Quartet**
Saturday, 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. at Pacchia, 410 E. Fifth St. No cover charge, but a two-drink minimum purchase is requested. www.pacchia.com.

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