

Featured Artist: Pete Mills

CD Title: Art And Architecture

Year: 2004

Record Label: Summit Records

Style: Straight-Ahead / Classic

Musicians: Pete Mills (tenor saxophone), Pete McCann (guitar), Bobby Floyd (piano), Dennis Irwin (bass), Matt Wilson (drums)

Review: The degree of excellence on Pete Mills' first CD for the Summit Records label, and only the second CD under his leadership, makes one wonder about the number of jazz musicians yet unheard on CD—those who have their own voices to offer, distinctive and exhilarating. How many other musicians are lurking out there, enjoyed by local and regional audiences but remaining unheard by the larger listening public, which buys the more readily available jazz CD's and attends the major jazz festivals and reads the few jazz magazines (the magazines in turn reporting by a large majority on the artists pitched by publicists)? In Mills' case, he had pursued a path that took him from his native Toronto to Rochester New York to Denton Texas to Greenville, North Carolina to Columbus, Ohio. And the recording of *Art And Architecture*, after B-3 organist Tony Monaco referred him to Summit Records, took him to Brooklyn New York as well, where he was joined with the first-call bass/drum combination of Dennis Irwin and Matt Wilson, not to mention with guitarist Pete McCann and another Columbus resident, pianist Bobby Floyd. *Art And Architecture*, consisting mostly of Mills' own compositions, is an outstanding work, the equal or better of many releases from entertainment conglomerate-owned labels, as if Mills had suddenly arrived with his talent already formed, when in reality, of course, such natural-sounding ability is the result of years of hard work.

Mills' quintet leaps right into thick of things with "Dot Com," a biting and quirky jump blues of exuberant rapidity that moves right into the improvisations without so much as a pause after the first chorus. That seamlessness continues throughout the tracks as Floyd picks up on the ideas that Mills drops at the end of his solo as if a baton were passed, even as Floyd views the tune's theme from a different perspective, one that's rooted in firmly rooted bass notes and handfuls of chords rather than Mills' Eddie Harris-like funk. In contrast, the next tune, "Seven Shades Of Blues," comes across with Latin-flavored ease, showing another side of Mills, as he molds notes rather than leaning into them. Just as notable is McCann's acoustic guitar solo, sensitive and consisting of lightly played chords, especially when it's compared to McCann's apparently John Scofield-influenced distortion and wide vibrato on electric guitar during his solo on the jazz jam-like "Clubfoot." But then, Mills' execution of his own difficult intervallic leaps on "Pumpkin Shoes" is just as impressive as he literally bounces over the entire expanse of the tenor sax in the first seven seconds of the tune, the high notes in the middle of the melody, such as it is, contrasting with the low notes near the bottom range of the instrument at the end of the repeated phrase.

Mills does include three jazz standards on the CD: "Chelsea Bridge" which features the haunting background atmosphere created by McCann behind Mills; "In Walked Bud" on which just bass and drums allow him to expand upon the harmonic possibilities at his leisure; and "Isfahan," gorgeously expressed over Irwin's bass lines built mostly on half notes. While I hesitate to repeat a point made in the liner notes, Mills' interpretation of "Isfahan" is *so* close to Joe Henderson's on *Lush Life: The Music Of Billy Strayhorn* that it appears to be a tribute. Mills offers similar attention to tone, the same instrumentation (Henderson's version a duo with Christian McBride; Mills' a duo with Irwin), the ability to characterize the song with unhurried touches and even playing in the same key. And so the comparison is unavoidable, and it becomes apparent that Henderson is one of Mills' main influences. He could do worse, to say the least. Possessing similar craftsmanlike attention to building their solos and playing at nothing less than a high level of artistry, Mills appears to have learned some valuable lessons by studying Henderson's style, and thus incorporating them into *Art And Architecture*.

But beyond the comparison, Pete Mills has evolved into a style that's all his own, and one that will be garnering broader attention as more people are knocked out by *Art And Architecture* too.

Tracks: Dot Com, Seven Shades Of Blue, In Walked Bud, Spin Dri, Chelsea Bridge, April Tune, Pumpkin Shoes, Remembrance, Clubfoot, Isfahan

Record Label Website: <http://www.summitrecords.com>

Artist's Website: <http://www.petemills.com>

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