



**JOE SYRIAN
MOTOR CITY
JAZZ OCTET
A BLUE TIME**

Finding your bliss can be a tricky disposition. This becomes even more complicated when you're a musician who tinkers with songs adored by millions around the globe. But within the rambunctious incubator known as "Jazz," it's just another day in the office for drummer Joe Syrian and his versatile Motor City Jazz Octet. All veteran instrumentalists, inspired arrangers and creative catalysts comfortable incorporating rock, pop, blues, and Latin music into their unique brand of Jazz, Syrian and his Motor City Jazz Octet are back for a new round of musical mischief with their second album *A Blue Time*.

Not satisfied putting new treads on old tires, *A Blue Time* has Syrian doubling down on reimagining compositions he's coveted throughout his career. Honoring the collective intelligence of his octet, *A Blue Time* finds Syrian using a remarkably analog system to explore this latest treasure chest of gems. "I just walk around with a little pad of paper in my pocket," Syrian shared, "and when I hear something I love, I think 'Oh, that'll work!' and jot it down to use later."

Along with several Jazz standards, Syrian continues to gracefully pare down vintage compositions with nimble arranging and clever orchestration, repositioning the artistic DNA of each song for old and new audiences alike. For Syrian "nothing beats taking a standard and giving it a new twist. You make it fresh in a way that allows people to listen to it differently." Twisting away, *A Blue Time* charms with covers whose enterprise excels through the vivid imagination of a band that cares deeply about the enduring legacy of special compositions.

Arranged by trombonist John Fedchock, Duke Jordan's *Jordu* gets the album off to a mellow start, with swinging and period appropriate solos by baritone saxophonist Carl Maraghi, trombonist Doug Beavers, and guitarist Paul Bollenback. Antonio Carlos Jobim's bossa nova standard *Agua de Beber* shifts into high gear through a rock inspired arrangement from Brian Stark. With Boris Kozlov on electric bass, the band glides through Jobim's storied chord changes highlighted by elegant solos from Bollenback and pianist Adam Birnbaum. Transforming Syrian's octet into a mini-big band, Beavers' stunning arrangement of *Teach Me Tonight* provides a perfect uptempo stage for vocalist Lucy Yeghiazaryan to summon the spirit of Dinah Washington while showcasing the authority of her own genius.

Leaning into the malleability of Lennon-McCartney's *Norwegian Wood*, Syrian gives the keys of the octet to Adam Birnbaum whose brilliant arrangement adds a third dimension to the song. Accentuating the meter and an exquisite use of space, Birnbaum transforms the tune into the kind of musical experiment that Syrian covets as "an exotic interpretation compelling people to experience the song in an entirely new way." Flexing a rewired Latin groove and the pyrotechnics of Bollenback's electric guitar, Brian Stark's arrangement of *Black Magic Woman* unfolds as the aged smoked paprika within the album's jambalaya-like musicality

Rich DeRosa's arrangement of Henry Mancini's 1963 hit *Charade* takes on a softer mood, featuring Maraghi on bass clarinet and Beavers on trombone, while Kenny Dorham's *Blue Bossa* is anchored by Lorin Cohen's evocative baseline, as Dave Riekenberg's tenor sax solo sets up a lively

musical debate between Nick Marchione's trumpet and Beavers' trombone. Eden Ahbez's *Nature Boy* takes on a captivating Afro-Latin groove elevated by another superb arrangement by John Fedchock and Syrian's complete and inventive command throughout the track. For Pablo Beltrán Ruiz's big band hit *Sway*, DeRosa's arrangement allows for a sharpened melody via a faster cadence and more elaborate horn work. *A Blue Time* ends the album by gently reminding us why Tadd Dameron was such a consummate bebop composer.

Music needs champions and great music is often championed by the drive and compassion of musicians like Joe Syrian. Perhaps most impressive here is the lack of ego you'll hear on *A Blue Time*. By acknowledging his band, Syrian respects that the distinct quality of his music depends on the combined efforts of the musicians he partners with. And so without having to scale steep mountains or maintain tenuous yoga positions for hours on end, Joe Syrian continues to nurture his bliss with a special brand of sonic momentum that begins within his thick note pad of innovation and hopefully ends somewhere near the vicinity of your heart.