

Mp3 Mo'fone - Surf's Up



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"A minimal but mighty romp." (East Bay Express) "Jazz's answer to the power rock trio."

(allaboutjazz.com) Unique 2-saxes-and-drums trio playing a wide range of fun, upbeat original funk, jazz, and New Orleans influenced tunes. 10 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Jazz Fusion, JAZZ: Weird Jazz Details:

Mo'Fone Reviews... What's up? The fabulously jazzy 'Surf's Up,' that's what! My favorite album of the year by far is "Surf's Up" (Evander Music) by the extraordinary trio Mo'Fone, an East Bay band featuring drummer Jeremy Steinkoler and saxophonists Larry De La Cruz and Jim Peterson, who alternate on alto and baritone. I was hooked from the first track, a buoyant, almost giddy version of Weather Report's "Black Market," with De La Cruz's surging bari replacing Jaco Pastorius' lithe basswork. The group came together through serendipity about two years ago when a bassist didn't show up for Steinkoler's gig at Cato's Ale House in Piedmont. De La Cruz lives nearby, so he came to the rescue at the last minute, joining Peterson for an unusual two-saxophone and drums trio. "We had so much fun playing, we said, 'Let's do that again,'" Steinkoler said. "A monthly gig at Cato's gave us a chance to work out material, and as soon as we started doing it, I felt really comfortable. I wasn't missing bass or rhythm guitar. It gave me a chance to use the bass drum in a different role." Steinkoler's orchestral approach to the trap set is thrilling. He's a whirlwind of activity, filling up empty spaces without sounding busy. But what makes "Surf's Up" such an exhilarating ride is its range of material. From Earl King's Mardi Gras classic "Big Chief" and Abdullah Ibrahim's savanna pastoral "African Market" to Billy Cobham's funk-laden "Crosswinds" and John Scofield's intricately grooving "Kool," Mo'Fone proves it's the biggest little band on the scene. On each piece, the trio finds ingenious ways of creating a full, multitextured, hard swinging sound. "It starts with one of us hearing a tune and imagining it in a different way, a combination of melody and bass line, and then we don't need no stinkin' chords," Steinkoler said. "Sometimes we'll come in with

a tune you wouldn't think would work. How can you play 'Big Chief' without the piano? Jim figures out parts he can fill up, weaving back and forth between bass parts and harmony. It kind of fools your ear. We've tried 'Black Dog' by Led Zeppelin, and we're doing 'Manic Depression' at the CD release." (Andy Gilbert, Contra Costa Times, 2003) Mo'Fone "The first Friday night of every month, The San Jose Museum of Modern Art hosts live music. The audience is a strange brew: young hipsters, brie-and-Chard museumgoers, dating retirees, and everyone in between. Even a few jazz fans show up. If they came at the beginning of May for Mo'Fone, they left more than impressed. Mo'Fone is jazz's answer to rock's power trio. Jeremy Steinkoler leads on the traps, delivering a steady onslaught of jazz and funk rhythms. He never descends into cliché; the dynamic nature of their music never gives him time to. Larry de la Cruz's sax work reminds me of Sonny Stitt in his later days, cool stuff served straight-up, never self-indulgent. What surprised me, and continues to, was the third man in this group, Jim Peterson on the baritone sax. Dressed in a gray double-breasted suit and looking a little like a CPA, he blew a mean horn, jumping with the beat and swooning around to deliver it to a nearby couple who'd decided to dance. And that's it: no bass, no piano, just two lower-register horns and a drummer. Gerry Mulligan's pianoless quartet taken to the next degree. I should add some caution to that comparison, though. Certainly this isn't a simple modern update of LA cool jazz. Everything's dripping of funk, much more modern than Mulligan's neo-Dixieland. And, just to make sure no one in the band (or audience) gets too comfy, both de la Cruz and Peterson deploy an arsenal of saxophones up and down the register, unwilling to sit behind their alto and baritone all night long. Although Mo'Fone's selections are perfect frameworks for improvisation, the group's far too mature to descend into cutting contests or far-out modal wanderings. I mistook one piece as a cover of "Pick Up the Pieces" without all that Average White Band aftertaste, and perhaps that's the best way I can describe their sound. Don't mistake me; this isn't reheated 1970s crossover. The band sounds fresh without losing sight of its jazz grounding. In a word, Mo'Fone delivers." (Jim Nelson, allaboutjazz.com) Mo'Fone Surf's Up (Evander Music) "From the streets of Soweto to those of New Orleans on Mardi Gras day, Mo'Fone takes a delightful, decidedly different romp through the musical riches of the African diaspora. The group's approach falls somewhere between those of the World Saxophone Quartet and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, but its instrumentation is more minimal than either. Composed of just trap drummer Jeremy Steinkoler and saxophonists Larry De La Cruz and Jim Peterson - with Danny Bittker adding a third sax voice on 3 of the 10 tracks - Mo'Fone achieves a mighty

big sound on its debut release. The saxophonists double on clarinets and flutes, and each takes a turn at the bottom, blowing ostinatos on baritone or bass sax over which the others soar in solos that at times suggest the urgency of Albert Ayler or Arthur Blythe. Steinkoler, a master of second line syncopation in the tradition of such Crescent City giants as James Black and Zigaboo Modeliste, provides the glue that holds together Mo'Fone's original tunes and intriguing treatments of material borrowed from Professor Longhair, Weather Report, Billy Cobham, David Murray, John Scofield, Hemant Kumar, and Abdullah Ibrahim." (Lee Hildebrand, SF Bay Guardian, 2003) "A minimal but Mighty Romp!" (Lee Hildebrand, East Bay Express, 2001)

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