

Mp3 Lee Russo - Trading Off



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Following the Blue Note Hardbop tradition 9 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Traditional Jazz Combo, JAZZ: Bebop
Details: CD Review - LEE RUSSO - Trading Off (LRS) by J Hunter No keyboards. No guitars. No other horns except for a guest artist in the middle of the disc. In short, no other lead instruments to fall back on. For most players, this would be like juggling torches while walking the high wire. Lee Russo wanted it this way for Trading Off, his first CD. Maybe he's an insane risk-taker. Or maybe he's got the goods. Here's a test: Look at the back of the Trading Off and squint, imagining the font is a little bolder. Then go to your CD collection and get something really classic on the Blue Note label - Dexter Gordon's One Flight Up, or Horace Silver's Song For My Father. Check out the back of that disc. Yup, you're right: It's the same. Russo put out a disc with the look of a Blue Note release. Maybe he's got delusions of grandeur. Or maybe he's got the goods. Forget maybe; there's no maybe about it. The disc should look Old School, because Russo's got an Old School tone, both in his playing and writing styles. In the liner notes, Lee says his influences are too numerous to mention. The opening track, Blues For Judith, reveals two influences right off, as Russo hits you with a West Coast mood and a mellow tenor sax that took me back to the first time I heard Paul Desmond. I will love Dave Brubeck until I die, but it was Desmond's singular sax work - mellow like Getz, but with an underlying edge as sharp as a knife - that elevated the Brubeck Quartet above everything else on the scene. Russo's playing has Desmond's edge while his writing has West Coast's sense of subtlety. Don't worry about your cholesterol, because Russo's not re-frying anything. He's learned his lessons well, but all these pictures come straight from Lee's easel. Diatonic is a frantic abstract painted one slash and splash at a time, while You're It is a happy, playful travelogue that lets Russo take off on soprano sax. It was a good choice for Russo to do a couple of numbers on soprano; given the small size of his group, some kind of tonal variation was needed to break up the

overall attack. Trading Off wouldn't be boring if Lee only played tenor, but why take the chance? Then again, there's no way this date could be boring, given the rhythm section. I said the disc didn't have any other lead instruments. In a traditional sense, that's true. That doesn't take into account Joe Barna, who makes drums a lead instrument the way Blakey and Max Roach did. Barna's solos and fills are as substantial as anything a piano or guitar could contribute. He kicks the intensity of Goldfinch and O's Waltz up notch after notch, and his solo on the title track would send West Coast aficionados running, leaving the rest of us to cheer wildly. We also get a taste of Barna's writing style with Ivory Romance, a wistful ballad that would be perfect on piano, though Russo's soprano is quite sufficient to the task. Ryan Berg's steady bass keeps the music on line, allowing Barna to drop bombs with impunity. Berg does contribute some nice solos, but his foundation work is what lets Russo and Barna do their thing. I mentioned a guest star, and nobody could be more important to the genesis of Trading Off. It's Leo Russo, Lee's father, and he doesn't just bring a smoking alto sax with him; he also brings his composition Kin, a bouncing tune that lets father and son do some serious formation flying. The harmonies they create have to make you smile, here and on the long-form piece O's Waltz. This wasn't a charity gig; Leo plays his butt off, and Lee shows the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree. Lee Russo credits his father for giving him the love of jazz, and of the saxophone. Leo Russo did his job well, because there's a lot of love mixed in with the blood, sweat and soul on Trading Off. One thing there isn't is frills. This is stripped-down, straight-up, Straight Ahead jazz that wouldn't have been out of place 50 years ago. Peter Allen was right: Everything old is new again. Ain't it great? J HUNTER is a former announcer/producer for radio stations in the Capital Region and the Bay Area, including KSJS/San Jose (where he was Assistant Music Director/Jazz programming), Q104 WQBK/Albany, and WSSV/Saratoga. He has also written music and theatre reviews for the Glens Falls Chronicle. He currently resides in Clifton Park.

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