

Mp3 Allen Houser Sextet - Washington Jazz Ensemble Ars 002



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Hard Bop/Romance Jazz Originals. Composers are Giddy Gillespie (1), Alec Wilder (1), and Allen Houser (4) 6 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Bebop, JAZZ: Romance Jazz Washington Jazz Ensemble ARS 002 Songs

Details: After graduating from Dartmouth College in 1962, I drove to Berkeley, California. I was a Wells Fargo bank teller by day and a jazz trumpet player at night. I met Trevor Koehler, a baritone saxophonist, and followed his quartet around, playing rehearsals and gigs. Smiley Winters was the drummer. This tune is my thanks to Trevor for including me in his music. He was the world-class blanché guy I knew who was surviving the "jazz life." He affected to New York in the early 1970's and played/toured with the Gil Evans Orchestra. He was also a part of (and named) a group called "The Insect Trust." "While We're Young" is an Alec Wilder tune I heard Tony Bennett sing on a PBS radio show hosted by Alec. Tenor player Buck Hill went on to record for Steeplechase Records and play in NYC and Europe as well. I believe this is the finest recorded example of his ballad playing artistry. "Continue" is perhaps my most complex composition and is intended, hopefully, as an inspiration to "get through" life's difficult transitions, and continue. Another mentor from my California days was tenor player Gentry Baker. I met him at a session in Oakland and we became pals. I used to pick him up at 5:30 A.M. and we'd drive over the Bay Bridge to Jack's of Sutter Street, in the Fillmore district of San Francisco, to sit in with Richard "Groove" Holmes at the Saturday morning jam sessions. (It was the one and only time I played with "Philly" Joe Jones.) One day, on the phone, I asked Gentry how a musician friend we knew was playing. Gentry said, "He Had It But He Lost It." This album was licensed to Bomba Records, Tokyo, in 1994. The Washingtonian Magazine "City Lights" by Joel Makower, May 1979 In the record business, there is little correlation between quality and success. Commercialism, connections, and whatever they now call

payola are but three explanations why most of our local favorites don't make it nationally. Increasingly, therefore, musicians with the energy and resources to do so have been recording and distributing their own discs, in hopes of getting heard by adventurous record buyers and ---perhaps---of being discovered by a major label. One local recorder is trumpeter Allen Houser, whose Silver Spring-based label, Allen Houser Records, has produced two excellent but unrecognized jazz albums. The world-class, NO SAMBA, and, with the exception of some air play and a boost by WMAL's Felix Grant, got virtually no notice (see below: "The Great Equalizer.") The most recent release features Houser in a sextet called THE WASHINGTON JAZZ ENSEMBLE, which is also the name of the album. It is surprising that the record has not received national acclaim, let alone local airplay. The ensemble includes some well-known DC musicians: saxophonist Buck Hill, pianist Vince Genova, bassist Steve Novosel, drummer Howard Chichester, and valve-trombonist Bob Balthis. The music is "be-bop"---a series of fluid, driving solos backed by a straight-ahead rhythm section. From the world-class cut on the world-class side, "Runnin' Wild With Trevor Koehler," there are strains of John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, and other creative forces from the 1950s. Downbeat Magazine Bill Shoemaker, September 1981 "Profile: Buck Hill" Hill regained local prominence during the early '70's. 1973 saw his return to recording as he delivered several inspired solos and solid front-line support to Washington trumpeter Allen Houser's NO SAMBA (ARS001). As with the more collective WASHINGTON JAZZ ENSEMBLE (ARS002) of a few years later, Hill was the principle perpetrator of a balance of driving rhythm and mellifluous phrasing reminiscent of the Jazz Messengers. The Washington Post "The Great Equalizer" by Ken Ringle, October 13, 1993 It must be very, very difficult for anyone accustomed to the racially and culturally balkanized Washington of recent years to imagine a time when the great bulk of people in the metropolitan area, black and blanched, schooled and unschooled, listened to the same music on the same radio station played almost every night by the same man. Yet for most of the 30 years his "Album Sound" jazz program was heard on WMAL radio five nights a week, Felix Grant was arguably the most unifying cultural force in this community and one of the most respected. He was just a broadcaster, he insisted, victim of a lifelong love affair with the medium of radio and with great music. In 1960 he heard a song by an unknown Brazilian guitarist named Luiz Bonfa, located others and played them on his program. Soon half the nation was humming "The Girl From Ipanema," bossa nova was the hottest sound outside of rock and a fellow named Sergio Mendes---whom Grant had found tugging his coat in Rio---was taking America by storm. In 1974

he heard something called reggae, hopped a plane to Jamaica and for three weeks introduced Washington---and much of America---to Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley. The University of Jamaica named its music library after him. The government of Brazil presented him with the Order of the Southern Cross. He outlasted Elvis. He outlasted folk music. He survived the Beatles, soft rock, hard rock, acid rock and even classic rock. Yet for most of his career, Grant was battling station managers suspicious of both his music and his popular appeal. ("The one thing in broadcasting you can almost always count on," he told a friend once in a rare moment of asperity, "is the musical stupidity of the station manager." When his ratings finally began to slip in 1979...WMAL abruptly fired him. The listener protest was so immediate and so fierce that the station not only reinstated him but held a news conference to apologize to the city for its "horrrrendous" mistake. Wrote one outraged fan at the time: "Washington Radio is losing an island of intelligence and good taste...in a sea of mindless talk." Grant lasted another five years on WMAL, but by then the fix was in. Commercial radio had bet its future on mass-produced formats emceed by shouting, rapid-babble "shock jocks" given to rabid self-promotion, bodily-function jokes and other gropes at adolescent humor. The concept of a modest professional like Grant who knew his own music, chose his own records and treated his audience with respect seemed almost quaint. Grant never understood how the profession he loved could so turn its back on what had long been regarded as its public mission to civilize and educate as well as entertain. "That doesn't mean you can't have fun. We had fun, for God's sake," he told an interviewer once. "We had fun with my show for 30 years. It's just that broadcasting used to be so much more." He continued to make it more on WDCU, which starting in 1984 to its great credit gave him a three-hour Saturday afternoon show for as long as he wanted it. Throughout his long battle with cancer he husbanded his energy to get to the studio on Saturdays and introduce his records with his characteristic blend of urbanity and scholarship. "I think it was doing that show that kept him alive so long," said WDCU Station Manager Edith Smith. For to Felix Grant music was a truly universal brotherhood. Long before the District of Columbia ended racial segregation downtown, he had been one of the rare blancheds haunting the black nightclubs along U Street, befriending and publicizing black performers and doing his best to make a mockery of any restriction or category based on race. "You know, nobody used to talk about 'black music' or 'blanched music,'" he said a few years ago. "There was jazz and rhythm and blues and so forth, but mostly there was just good music and bad. The great performers of both races---Duke Ellington is a particular hero of mine---strived not for ethnicity but for a

kind of universal excellence. You could hear it in the way they played." He left his immense music library to the University of the District of Columbia---the final gesture of an artist who lived and died believing the cultural riches that bring people together can defeat the poisons that drive them apart.

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