

Mp3 Kevin Merritt - All The People



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Small combo acoustic grooves, singer-songwriter finger picking, a blast of r&b horns mixed with soulful piano ballads; it's jazz inspired pop and folk inspired rock. 13 MP3 Songs ROCK: Acoustic, EASY LISTENING: Soft Rock Details: Kevin Merritt is many things: jazzy piano stylist, strong vocalist, mellow acoustic guitar finger-picker, attentive producer. Mostly, though, what he is, is ambitious. Many singer/songwriters, self-producing a first album, end up with a wispy collection of song-sketches, lone vocals accompanied by guitar or piano-perhaps with some basic drum machine tracks for support. Merritt apparently didn't see much point in thinking small: his debut, "all the people", features a small orchestra of crack New York City session musicians-horns, backup vocalists, guitar heroes, hand percussionists, a timpani player (!)-who complement Merritt's earnest and encouraging observations on life with all kinds of instrumental verve. Swinging small combo grooves rub elbows with searing guitar feedback, as snappy alto sax solos and the occasional programmed drum loop make timely appearances in the mix. The result is a vibrant, colorful album that goes far beyond the monochrome offered by too many singer/songwriters. Think: "The Many Moods of Kevin Merritt". Kevin is an unrepentant child of classic soft rock, a spiritual heir to the lighter side of early 70's American pop music. References to Harry Chapin, Billy Joel, and James Taylor abound on "all the people", and all but a couple of the songs feature "Me Decade"-style first person narration, expressing mostly upbeat views on love, personal challenge, and a life well-lived. Indeed, this sunny optimism and near-total lack of irony is one of the most refreshing things about the album. Song titles like "You're Okay", "Little Romance", and "Just A Smile", should give you a clue as to whether Merritt's glass is half-full or half-empty. Like the artists he looks up to, Merritt's first priority is melody. Every song on the record sports at least one quality melodic hook, and some are just stuffed with hummable goodies. "Time Comes" is a classic 6/8 singalong, with a lilting swing that leads inexorably to

the chorus and its payoff line, "don't worry, there'll be time when the time comes". It's a great match of music and lyric, and the rest of the album proves that to be one of Merritt's skills. "Another Girl Like You" continues the melodic approach, but ups the instrumental ante. Copping stylistic cues from Van Morrison, the tune kicks off with a blast of R&B horns (Alan Rubin of the Blues Brothers on trumpet), which punctuate a cute and dryly comic tale of serially unrequited love. You can't feel too sorry for the narrator, though, when he's singing over a groove as fun and bouncy as this one. "Sister Rosa", another singable tune about running into the devil at a bar, is equally catchy. Though it's not a Merritt original (it's one of only two tunes on the album that he didn't write), he successfully puts his own stamp on the tune, using propulsive drum loops and lo-fi soundbites to give an off-kilter spin to the straightforward narrative. The sun does not shine every day, of course: fortunately, Merritt is almost as engaging when he's addressing some of the darker aspects of life. The subtle, reflective guitar in "Circles" draws listeners into a wistful exploration of loss and uncertainty, and the title track, a clear-eyed look at the doubts and fears we all confront in pursuit of our dreams, shimmers with a subtle Beatles vibe (not too surprising, when you consider that Merritt's co-producer, George Small, was John Lennon's piano player of choice in the '70s). Percussive cellos push the beat, and Fab-style trippy effects keep the audience off balance, occasionally threatening to overwhelm the music. "I'm Done", a swinging exercise in world-weary hipness with a surprising chorus, is more successful-in fact, it may be the best song on the record. Taking such an eclectic approach to a first album is a chancy proposition. By playing with such a wide range of styles, grooves, instruments, tempos and textures, a fledgling artist runs the very real risk of drowning himself out. Merritt was clearly betting that his voice, which is front and center on every track, and his personal artistic focus would be enough to hold everything together. Merritt's gamble pays off handsomely. All the different collaborators, orchestrations and production techniques enhance, rather than dilute, the music, and the album gains strength with every stylistic border it crosses. Here's hoping that Kevin Merritt decides to commit more of his mood swings to tape.

About the Artist Kevin Merritt is a singer songwriter from Berkeley, California. He attended both UC Berkeley and UCLA in music before moving to New York City. His style merges the singer/songwriter folk tradition with an interest in modern pop and classic jazz. He performs both in California and New York.

BAND_MEMBERS: Kevin Merritt- vocals, guitar George Small (Lennon's Double Fantasy)- piano, keyboards Chip Fabrizi- drums Aaron Alexander- drums, percussion Ray Peterson- bass Brad Shepik- guitars Alan Rubin (Blues Brothers)- trumpet Birch Johnson

(Blues Brothers)- trombone Rob DeBelis- sax plus guest soloists...

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