

DOWNBEAT

February, 2008

Mel Martin/Benny Carter Quintet

Just Friends »

JAZZED MEDIA 1025

★★★★

Richie Cole

The Man With The Horn

JAZZ EXCURSION 111

★★★½

Unknown material from the distant past can either alter your perceptions of an artist or confirm them. Jazz colossus Benny Carter's place in history was cemented

long before this live recording from April 1994. It's a pleasantly spirited victory lap, as he was still an active composer at 87 and a marvel of alto sax longevity. In the company of a splendid Mel Martin-led band, Carter played featured soloist and ambassador with a bulging portfolio. Richie Cole's 1981 studio date—his first recorded meeting with pianist Bobby Enriquez—summons the volatile unpredictability of the *Alto Madness* days. Both outings were recorded in the San Francisco area: Carter at the original Yoshi's in Oakland; Cole at Russian Hill Recording.

Tenor saxophonist Martin is somewhat deferential to Carter on *Just Friends*, setting the table with the opening solo on a popping "Perdido," or using scalar forays that echo the tone of Carter's zesty solo on "Secret Love." Carter needed no special allowances made for him, though. He sticks to the middle register, for the most part, but displays rhythmic assurance and sly humor in his impish upper-register turns. Each man was audibly delighted to be in the company of the other.

On his disc, Martin makes a gorgeous flute feature out of Carter's



"People Time." Pianist Roger Kellaway harmonizes discreetly and effectively, and bassist Jeff Chambers and drummer Harold Jones provide tasteful rhythm accompaniment, offsetting a few jarring tone clusters from Kellaway; nothing wrong with a little creative sabotage now and then.

Taste has seldom been a word applied to Cole's earlier years. He thrived on wild-card inspiration to his high-velocity bebop. When he met Enriquez, two kindred spirits were united. Those two didn't just joust, they conducted musical firefights. The mid-range volume of a Bruce Forman guitar solo—despite the complexity of the notes—is sonic relief to the near-unhinged sax and piano improvisations on *The Man With The Horn*. Marquez pounds block chords like high-speed typewriter keys on a blazing "Confirmation," and Cole cuts through the tune like a flamethrower.

"Penthouse Serenade" slows them down momentarily, but Cole's strident tone indicates he can't wait to get back to the rough stuff. He not only makes a burlesque out of "Peg Of My Heart," but "Easy Street" is a peeler's soundtrack, complete with raunchy tenor and drummer Scott Morris' splashy cymbals and dotted triplets. Enriquez's overly busy work on "Man With A Horn" aids Cole's tongue-in-cheek rendition with Technicolor crescendos. It might not have been your kind of humor, but Cole and Enriquez worked as well together as Martin and Lewis. —Kirk Silsbee

Just Friends: Perdido; People Time; Secret Love; Spritely; Elegy In Blue; Just Friends. (63:53)

Personnel: Mel Martin, tenor saxophone, flute; Benny Carter, alto saxophone; Roger Kellaway, piano; Jeff Chambers, bass; Harold Jones, drums.

» Ordering info: jazzedmedia.com

The Man With The Horn: Confirmation; Adios; Penthouse Serenade; New York Afternoon; Peg Of My Heart; Save Your Love For Me; Jeannine; Easy Street; Man With A Horn; Slaughter On Tenth Avenue; Um Ummm. (67:45)

Personnel: Richie Cole, alto and tenor saxophone; Bobby Enriquez, piano; Bruce Forman, guitar; Marshall Hawkins, bass; Scott Morris, drums.

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