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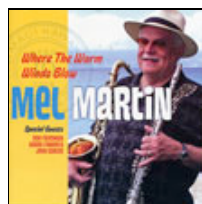


Mel Martin - Where the Warm Winds Blow - Jazzed Media

Mr. Versatility



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Mel Martin - Where the Warm Winds Blow - Jazzed Media JM1043, 62:11 ****1/2:

(Mel Martin, soprano and tenor sax, clarinet and bass clarinet, flute and alto flute; Don Friedman, acoustic and Fender Rhodes pianos; Brad Buethe and Barry Finnerty, guitars; Robb Fisher, bass; Jeff Marris, drums; John Santos, congas and percussion)

If it has a reed, then Mel Martin can probably play it (well!). Add flutes to the mix and you can place a few more instruments onto the bandstand. Need a tribute band, say to honor Charles Mingus or Benny Carter? Look no farther than Mr. Martin, again. Not sure if saxophones belong in rock bands? Well, if you lived in the Bay Area in the 70s, Mel Martin can answer that question. That is especially true if you followed Bay Area stalwarts, Santana, Cold Blood, Boz Scaggs, and Van Morrison. Mel Martin was always there to provide a sax solo.

Not content to rest on his laurels as a superb sideman, Mel joined the move to fusion in the late 70s with Listen. In the 80s, who better to form a group called Bebop and Beyond, than Mel Martin. He had been there/done that. Mel has always been a West Coast recognized legend. Jump forward a few decades, and Graham Carter, owner of Jazzed Media, who is always in the know for under-recognized and unappreciated talent, gave Martin a recording contract. Jazzed Media released, *Just Friends*, (reviewed here), outtakes from Martin's 1994 encounter with the incomparable Benny Carter, from live sessions at Yoshi's in Oakland, Ca. It showed the respect and love that these two musicians had for each other, and the superb sound on that CD was a pleasant bonus.



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Mel Martin is back with a new Jazzed Media release, *Where the Warm Winds Blow*, and it is a pleasure again to have Mel back as a leader. Never content to rest on his laurels, Mel brings a wide variety of jazz stylings to this release. *Rhythm Man (Do Not Disturb)* opens the disc with a fusion/bop mix. Straight ahead tenor is mixed with Fender Rhodes piano provided by keyboard master, Don Friedman, whose swirling piano lines bring us back a few decades. Mel's liner notes makes mention of Miles Davis, the master of eclectic restlessness, and the inspiration for several of the tracks on *Where the Warm Winds Blow*. George Russell's *Ezz-Thetic*, is next, and again Friedman shines with a swinging solo around Mel's soprano sax. *Silly Hawk Walk* is a gas, with the Fender Rhodes stirring the pot around bop lines from Mel. Brad Buethe's electric guitar here also elicits a Miles' vibe.

The title track follows, and taken at a waltz-like pace, both Mel and Friedman provide the lovely Benny Carter melody. Herbie Hancock's *I Have a Dream* has always been a favorite of Mel's and here he adapts the horn arrangements of Hancock for woodwinds - a highlight of the CD. Continuing the tribute theme, Martin provides a lovely rendition of the Miles Davis/ Bill Evan's classic, *Blue in Green*, where Mel pours his heart out in a passionate solo. This track was recorded live at Jazz at Pearl's in San Francisco in 2006. Weaver of Dreams, the most straight-ahead arrangement here, closes out the CD in a lyrical fashion.

I'd be remiss if I did not mention that in addition to producing *Where the Warm Winds Blow*, that Mel also mixed, edited, and mastered all tracks using a Mac with Logic Pro 8.02. This, no doubt, must have been a labor of love project for Mel Martin and kudos must go out as well to Jazzed Media for turning over the entire project to Mr. Versatility.

TrackList: Rhythm Man (Do Not Disturb), Ezz-Thetic, In the Stars, Silly Hawk Walk, Where the Warm Winds Blow, I Have a Dream, Blue in Green, To Catey With Love, Weaver of Dreams

- Jeff Krow

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