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MICHAEL BENEDICT & BOPITUDE *Bopitude*

by Tom Pierce

Michael Benedict & Bopitude's very accomplished album evoked very enjoyable memories of live performances in New York & albums in the 1960's by the "Big 3" stellar Hard Bop bands of Art Blakey, Horace Silver & Cannonball Adderley and many others.

Track listing:

1. Cheesecake
2. Circulation
3. Alter Ego
4. Joy Spring
5. Frankenstein
6. B For BB
7. Heckle and Jeckle
8. Whistle Stop
9. Moanin'

Personnel:

Chris Pasin – trumpet & flugelhorn
 Brian Patneaude – tenor sax
 Bruce Barth – piano
 Mike Lawrence – bass
 Michael Benedict – drums

[click here for audio samples or to purchase this CD](#)

[click here to learn more about Michael Benedict](#)

Hard Bop's incorporation of the elements & spirit of Gospel, Rhythm & Blues and Funk, on top of the advanced, technically challenging bedrock of the initial 1940's Be-Bop created by Charlie Parker & Dizzy Gillespie made for a very exciting, emotionally engaging and highly musical form. It has endured in popularity and acclaim by musicians, critics and fans for over 50 years, and has not only avoided sounding dated, but has remained a very fresh sounding, key component of the broad modern Jazz mainstream.

Michael Benedict, Bopitude and Planet Arts' Tom Bellino deserve major kudos with this CD for a number of significant reasons. High among these are Benedict's decision to draw the songs from a wide range of musician-composers, rather than just the aforementioned "Big 3", thus avoiding any sameness throughout the recording. Also, his choice of these particular musicians (with proficient chops, broad experience and imaginative adaptability) ensured impressively effective interpretation of the diverse material.

Pianist Bruce Barth's inspired comping & solos reflect the broad national experience he has gained in more than 20 years of playing with countless exceptional musicians in this country & abroad. The professional esteem with which he is held is reflected in his being asked to perform on July 20 at the 92nd street Y in New York, as part of the "Key Players" band, alongside 3 other internationally acclaimed pianists: Kenny Barron, Bill Charlap and Bill Mays.

Brian Patneaude again shows his admirable ability to fit in and excel in almost any Jazz situation. His powerful solo on "Cheesecake" (that I first heard this band perform live in April at the Schenectady Musicians' Union April Jazz Appreciation event) was memorable.

Chris Pasin's trumpet & flugelhorn project a strong, warm and lyrical tone that adds to each of these selections. Mike Lawrence, on bass, provides the kind of solid, steady support this rhythmically demanding and diverse music requires.

And Benedict's own extensive experience on drums, vibes, and leading full orchestras, combined with his lack of ego, helps explain how he succeeded so well in his stated goal of the CD being a "true collaborative effort", rather than primarily a "drummer's album".

From the opening bars of Dexter Gordon's classic "Cheesecake" (from his classic 1962 Blue Note album "Go") to the closing notes of pianist Bobby Timmons' enormously popular & ultra-soulful "Moanin'", the listener is taken for a swinging, invigorating ride.

The fact that the solos are concise & focused, so that almost all the tunes are in the 5-6 minute range, is also commended. That not only keeps them very listenable, but allows the CD to include nine selections, showcasing the compositions of many lesser known but excellent composer/performers.

In addition to the two aforementioned well known songs and the equally renowned Clifford Brown's "Joy Spring", one of those admirable though lesser known ones includes "Frankenstein", written by Grachan Moncur III. Here the somewhat unconventional, but engaging melody & voicings strongly hinted at the forceful Avante Garde strain he was usually more associated with. Hank Mobley's easy loping blues, "B For BB" contrasts nicely with this – as does saxophonist's Bobby Watson's spirited "call & response" oriented "Heckle and Jeckel", pianist James Williams' relaxed gentle mood on passages of "Alter Ego", and composer/arranger Gary McFarland's bouncy ensemble riffs of his "Circulation".

The overall effort comes across as a well-conceived, emotionally absorbing, and beautifully balanced tribute to Hard Bop that lovers of complex, stimulating, yet accessible Jazz will appreciate.

Tom Pierce has had a burning passion for Jazz for over 50 years, initiated and fueled by seeing live in New York City, starting in the early 1960's, virtually every major artist still performing. He's been very happily living in Guilderland since 2001, as an active retiree sharing his love of music by writing online reviews for a number of web sites, preparing DVD presentations to various groups, co-Hosting Radio programs showcasing his favorite artists and busily supporting A Place for Jazz in a variety of ways.