

GROOVE YARD – REVIEWS

as of: June 24, 2005



What utter sensuous artistry!! What sublime tracks of flute mystique!!! This is a first for me to review the west coast craftsmanship of one Bradley Leighton, jazz flautist extraordinaire. The frosting is his choice to use some of the more hidden musical treasures of the great "Tom Jobim" which Bradley nails with total abandon and supreme melodic panache. This is a player who offers us his music, harmony, and melodies in a visceral, sophisticated, & ethereal manner. Yet his renderings are lyrical and traditional as well. No turbulence here...just a lovely cache of notes that are legato or sustained. Animated or dynamic.

~George W. Carroll/The Musicians Ombudsman – ejazznews.com

The intros languish gently into some really cool flute by Bradley on this fine lil' jazz CD... it's not due on the street until August 23rd this year - & if you're a dedicated jazz listener, this will be one you'll just have to have! As I commented (issue #70) in a review of his "Just Doin' Our Thang" CD, his flute is "delicate" & "fine". The distinct Latino flavoring on the tracks chosen for this album take that description up a notch, as they've got a bit more "passion" in the architecture (hmmm.... never heard of architecture with passion before, but I don't edit my thoughts very often... improvised writing, ya' know?)... heh! heh! Mike Wofford's flashy piano, Bob Magnusson's solid bass, Duncan Moore's dancing drums, Allen Phillips poignant percussives & Jaime Valle's great guitar work all contribute to making a musical experience that you'll never forget. This is another KEEPER from Bradley, & it also gets our MOST HIGHLY RECOMMENDED rating for any/all who DIG truly spirited (yet gentle) jazz! You owe it to your ears to GET this one!

~Rotcod Zzaj, Improvijazzation Nation, June 2005

Flutist (or flautist, if you prefer) Bradley Leighton renders a skillfully arranged album of instrumental jazz standards with his first solo release.

Leighton, new to San Diego from the Seattle area, has compiled six tracks of classics originally written by artists ranging from Carl Perkins to Antonio Carlos Jobim (considered by many as the George Gershwin of Brazil). The notes emanating from Leighton's flute allude to something fresh and clear as they lead and complement a superb rhythm section. They stray from the softer, mellow tones that might be expected from a flute and burst into something crisp, lucid, and commanding.

The soft "Mojave" opens the album, and it's a great ride from there up until the closing notes of "Road Song." The tracks are lengthy, each over six minutes, and provide much stylistic contrast from one to the next as the album rolls through the whimsical and romantic "Fotografia," the lively Latin beat of "Dona Maria," and the meditative "Road Song." The uplifting, energetic "Groove yard" is the album's standout track as a cool-sounding, slow funk tune that's loaded with percussion. Leighton's weightier harmonies on this track contrast with his usual sprightly tones found throughout most of the other tracks and reveal another side to his musical capabilities. This album truly delivers.

~Mary Montgomery, San Diego Reader

I would describe his album, *Groove Yard*, as Straight-ahead jazz for the Smooth and Contemporary jazz set. His selections definitely have the unmistakable energy and improvisation that marks it as Straight-ahead but is so warm and inviting that it would be appropriate to have it playing while you're romanticising that special someone in your life. The title track has the funky bass grooves that make jazz what it is while his rendition of Wes Montgomery's "Road Song" is an upbeat, finger-snapping tribute to one of the greatest jazz musicians of our times. Bradley gets Latin on us with the smooth lines of Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Fotografia" and also the first cut "Mojave" featuring the great guitar licks of Jaime Valle. If this album doesn't give you enough of Bradley Leighton then you can check him out on other releases such as [Seattle Groove and Funky Brothers](#).

~Derick Winterberg, thesmoothjazzsite.com

Bradley Leighton's debut album announces a talent engaged with the articulation of jubilant truths. Articulation is all. Happiness is at the heart of this enterprise. Here you'll find no anxious searches for lost chords, no futile seeking after bop-inflected arpeggios.

The prevailing musical truth crafted in *Groove Yard* (an apt summation of the whole) is uttered in perfectly phrased tones that romp across vamps, whoops, glides and beautifully-voiced rhythmic shouts that often whisper with lyric joy. Impossible as it is not to be impressed by such a daunting initial offering, it is equally difficult to avoid wondering how this remarkable inauguration took place.

Begin with Bradley Leighton's essential attribute: A deeply self-confident instrumental tone. The provocative *misterioso* of this man's flute lures you in. Put this disc on and crank the volume. Step outside on a summer day. Open the paper. Snatch your gardening tools. Halfway through "Mojave" you'll be back inside, plunked smack before your speakers. Mike Wofford's two chorus ride on piano delivers you to the sound of heaven laughing. Could any partnership be more beguiling? Wait. Continue listening. The happy madness has only started.

"Groove Yard" sets you up, as if the sound of joy and musical laughter needed the loping gallop of an old trolley car to push it further. The heart of this album's cheerful force resides with the three songs that follow. Antonio Carlos Jobim's understated (often-overlooked) "Fotografia" sweeps you toward gentle dancing. At the outset, guitarist Jaime Valle invokes Bola Sete and the grand Brazilian legacy. His chords hang like raindrops from jungle fronds. Wofford's delicate touch cradles sunshine. Leighton's alto flute sorts the clearing. Music does not speak more sweetly -- mature lyric strength defined by utter relaxation -- than what we find as these musicians trade songful thoughts. One has the spooky sense that Tom Jobim was in the studio when such seemingly self-evident eloquence emerged.

Duduka Da Fonseca's "Doña Maria" poses a problem worth solving: how to laugh and cry at once -- a poignant mood that descends upon us now and then, a mood that liberates despair by giving pent-up perplexities room to dissolve in philosophical bemusement. The urge that Leighton's arranger offers, however, moves past resigned contemplation to staunch resolve. Listen closely. Da Fonseca's bittersweet near-irony is displaced as this interpretation scoots forward: resilience supplants uncertainty, exuberance stands in place of questions. We need more songs with complex emotional and structural landscapes. We need more bands with this degree of unself-serving integrity.

"Bahia" may be the masterpiece of a brilliant album. This gorgeous melody will own your heart no matter what or how, but under the swarthy grandeur of Bradley Leighton's soaring long-lined phrasing, you cannot escape its appeal.

A word about this album's inception and execution. Notice its suave design. Bradley Leighton made a crucial, never disappointing choice. He chose magnificent musicians and put them in the artistic command of a master orchestrator. Jaime Valle's musical insight suffuses this powerful album.

Groove Yard is a deft collaboration between an undismissably astute instrumentalist and a cagey old pro. Leighton here gives himself room, from this point forward, to do whatever his imagination and talent allow. Valle demonstrates once more that he has not yet published enough of his emotionally stunning, deeply savvy music. One man's beginning is another's reconfirmation. Seldom do musical partnerships start so effortlessly, so perfectly voiced.

Groove Yard, in sum, joins the brilliant-toned force of Bradley Leighton's calm authority with the daring precision of Jaime Valle's musical skills. It draws no less upon the sublime artistry of one of the most engaging and significant pianists in the world of jazz, Mike Wofford. Bassist Bob Magnusson is without equal in several ways that make his difficult instrument both the unacknowledged and unforgettable foundation of each instance of lyrical wisdom imparted here. Provocateur Allan Phillips seems to float and sparkle everywhere on this disc. Is there a more imaginative, discretely masterful percussionist anywhere? I doubt it. Drummer extraordinaire Duncan Moore seems to be on more albums that "merely work" -- a euphemism for that improbable achievement, genuinely seductive music -- than any other. How interesting it is to contemplate the unsung victory of authentically musical time keeping. This band, these men, Bradley Leighton's self-confident ease and Jaime Valle's sage judgment, conspire to make sounds that will own part of you once you let them in. I'll bet you can't listen once. Think how many albums deserve one hearing. I'll bet you cannot give *Groove Yard* only one. ~JIM MEROD is Pro Sound and Music