Everette Harp - First Love (2009)

01. Council of Nicea, The
02. Before You Leave
03. Soul Fries
04. Blossom
05. First Love
06. Texas Groove
07. Goin' Through Changes
08. Central Park West
09. Departure
10. Our Love is Here To Stay

Everette Harp (Sax Alto, Soprano, Tenor); Lenny Castro (Percussion);
George Duke (Piano, Electric, Fender Rhodes, Soloist);
James Genus (Bass Electric, Bass Upright); Dwight Sills (Guitar);
Reggie C. Young (Trombone).

On First Love, contemporary jazz saxophonist and composer Everette Harp moves deeper into the space he addressed on 2007's excellent My Inspiration. Whereas on that album, he was still digging deeply into his own brand of funky jazz, he was also looking for something. His soloing on the album was sharper, brighter, and more complex, but his arrangements and production style were slick enough to get his jams on the radio. On First Love, it sounds like Harp found what he was seeking. In the liners, he mentions some of his heroes like John Coltrane and Dave Brubeck, and how his first hearing records like Soultrane and Time Out made him fall in love with the music. Produced by George Duke, this set is one of the most remarkable and thought-provoking recordings to come out of the contemporary jazz genre in ages. The meld of acoustic and electric instruments here is perfectly balanced. Melodic and harmonic structures are much more complex and don't always fit the C-jazz cookie-cutter mold. Check his original "The Council of Nicea," one of the most satisfying things here. Harp's tenor is accompanied by

James Genus' acoustic bass, and some spot-on breaks by Terri Lyne Carrington, a beautiful bluesy, hard bop trumpet solo by Michael "Patches" Stewart, and Lenny Castro's hand percussion. Directing the band is Duke on Fender Rhodes with help from the exquisite if understated electric guitar work from Dwight Sills. The ballad "Before You Leave" follows suit with Carrington providing elegant brushwork. These are pretty basic straight-ahead numbers. This is not to suggest that there isn't some funky work here, too. Check Duke's "Soul Fries" with Genus on electric bass. The funkiness of the Rhodes is smokin' and the blues factor in Harp's playing with Stewart gets a solid groove going behind a tight, sophisticated arrangement. Duke contributes one more cut to the set, the killer Latin-ized fusion funk of "Departure." It's a midtempo ballad, but its knotty bridges and Genus' electric bass work turn it all inside out. The biggest surprise here, however, is in the beautifully restrained but intensely soulful reading of Coltrane's "Central Park West." Here is the place where Harp's mastery of the tenor horn is on full display with an abundance of warmth and depth. It is an absolutely gorgeous reading of the tune. Given the half-acoustic/half-electric division of the tracks here, the originals are easily the most sophisticated, confident, and masterfully played of Harp's career thus far, and the covers fit in seamlessly, making this his finest recording to date. ---Thon Jurek, Rovi

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