George Shearing - Blues Alley Jazz (1979)

1. One for the Woofer (Taylor) 8:04 2. Autumn in New York (Duke) 4:42 play *3. The Masquerade Is Over (Magidson, Wrubel) 6:18 4. That's What She Says (Fest 3:45 5. Soon It's Gonna Rain (Jones, Schmidt) 4:34 6. High and Inside (Torff) 3:28*
play
7. For Every Man There's a Woman (Arlen, Robin) 3:41 8. This Couldn't Be the Real Thing (Mulligan, Torme) 3:17
George Shearing (piano); Brian Torff (bass).

Pianist George Shearing started a productive ten-year association with the Concord label with this live set, a duo outing matching him with the brilliant bassist Brian Torff. Their performances are virtuosic, intuitive, full of sly wit and always swinging; it is surprising that Torff did not become more famous. The close interaction between the two masterful musicians on such numbers as Billy Taylor's "One for the Woofer," "The Masquerade Is Over" and a humorous "Lazy River" are quite impressive as is Shearing's surprisingly effective vocal on "This Couldn't Be the Real Thing." This CD is recommended. ---Scott Yanow

BLUES ALLEY JAZZ, a live duo performance, pairs pianist George Shearing with bassist Brian Torff for an evening of highly accessible bop playing. The melodic voicings that Shearing popularized with his quintet are still in the mix here, but with significantly more freedom for the pianist to move fluidly around the keyboard, peeling off complex solos chock full of quotations and cleverly re-invented melodic fragments. Versions of Billy Taylor's "One for the Woofer" and Hoagy Carmichael's "Up a Lazy River" display Shearing's quick wit and improvisatory flair.

Torff impresses with his lightning-swift runs and smooth, rhythmic sensibility. He is as comfortable holding the bottom end down with subtle elegance as he is blazing across the frets in harmonic dialogue with Shearing's lines. The interplay between the two is seamless on ballads ("Autumn in New York") and funky, Latin-tinged numbers ("That's What She Says"). On the whole, the date has a sophisticated, supper-club feel (note Shearing's sincere vocal on "This Couldn't Be the Real Thing"), with plenty of chops to please hardcore jazz fans.

Recorded live at Blues Alley, Washington, D.C. in October 1979. --- cduniverse.com

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