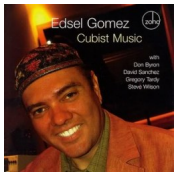
Edsel Gomez - Cubist Music (2006)



01. NYC Taxi Ride 02. To the Lord 03. Wolfville 04. Ladybug 05. Juan Tizol *play*
06. Minetta Triangle 07. Coqui Serenade 08. Empty House
play
09. "Adoracion" Variations 10. Harmolodic Collage 11. West 54th Street Theme 12. 3-3 Clave 13. Molly
Personnel: Edsel Gomez (piano); Edsel Gomez; Steve Wilson (alto saxophone); Greg Tardy, Gregory Tardy (tenor saxophone); Don Byron (clarinet); Miguel Zenón (alto saxophone); David Sanchez (tenor saxophone); Drew Gress (acoustic bass); Bruce Cox (drums).

Puerto Rican pianist Edsel Gomez lived in Brazil for ten years, and that country's influence is evident in his playing. His Caribbean roots have not been lost, however, and a blend of those different tendencies is evident on Gomez's debut as a leader. One of the first tracks that stands out on Cubist Music is "Lady Bug, a blend of Latin and bebop with horns (played by Don Byron, David Sanchez, Miguel Zenon, Steve Wilson and Greg Tardy) coming together for a fiery intro that moves quickly into a Cuban-esque groove. At Jazz Standard last month, the Latin influence of the piece was kept clear by the piano, but the rest of the live band (James Zollar, Wilson, Peter Brainin, Kenny Davis, Henry Cole) took the song elsewhere.

"Juan Tizol is a blues-inspired tune which is so subtle that any distraction might disrupt one's concentration. When played live, conversations taking place came to a halt, the audience quickly becoming entranced. On another bluesy tune, "The Minetta Triangle, Gomez clearly borrows from Vince Guaraldi, and both David Sanchez and Don Byron have fun performing a call-and-response improvisation around the theme.

"Coqui Serenade makes evident Gomez's debt to Antonio Carlos Jobim—there is a clear bossa

nova element here, especially in Bruce Cox's drumming and the soft touch on the piano. The rest of the band also plays very softly, bringing to mind a remark by Frank Sinatra's trombonist during the making of the Jobim-Sinatra album in 1967: "If I blow any softer, it'll come out of the back of my head!

Although the album is comprised mostly of Gomez originals, he also plays compositions by other writers in live performance. At Jazz Standard, he took on Chico Buarque's "Samba de Orly with a markedly different approach from the original, yet preserved its samba feel (which meant that Cole had to keep the beat steady while the others played more freely). The sextet showed great skill and took advantage of magnificent opportunities to showcase individual talent—Buarque would be proud. ---Ernest Barteldes, allaboutjazz.com

In his U.S. recording debut as a leader, Edsel Gomez is a man with a theory. His concept of musical Cubism advocates an improvisational approach based on small self-contained melodic phrases or motivic patterns, analogous to the building blocks of Cubist paintings.

Gomez has assembled a high-powered team for this project. Whether or not Don Byron, Miguel Zenon, David Sanchez, Steve Wilson and Gregory Tardy are thinking about Gomez' "complete unit patterns" when they solo, it is clear that something special is going on here by way of aesthetic stimulus. All five reed players are especially sharp and focused, and indeed they often sound like they are working from smaller structural elements, creatively and intensively juxtaposed.

Wilson's short, quick alto-saxophone figures cohere into an ambitious design on "To the Lord." Sanchez (on tenor), Wilson (on flute) and Byron (on clarinet) all paint with sharp Cubist angles and vivid colors on "Ladybug." Zenon and Gomez exchange modular ideas that accumulate to a sincere homage on "Juan Tizol."

Gomez' piano work, in its detailed overlays, episodic contrasts and huge dynamic swings, may or may not be Cubist but is definitely distinctive, and he writes intriguing compositions. Cubist Music is an impressive debut, although Gomez is not well served by the veiled, pallid recorded sound. --- Thomas Conrad, jazztimes.com

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