Frank Harrison Trio - Lunaris (2014)



01. My Love and I 02. I'm Old Fashioned 03. Stars 04. An Evening of Spaceships and UFOs 05. Io 06. Sunrise (Port Meadow} 07. Ascent 08. The Bird 09. BoRG-58 10. The Recruited Colier 11. Emily 12. Stars II Frank Harrison - piano, synthesizer Dave Whitford - bass Enzo Zirilli – drums

London-based pianist Frank Harrison is probably best known for his work backing saxophonist Gilad Atzmon, but his Lunaris should help to raise his profile as a major league piano trio guy. It's Harrison's third recorded effort in the trio format, and it stands out in a crowded field full of talent.

Harrison and the trio go against common advice and open with a ballad, a solemn, tender, gorgeously spacious take on David Raksin's tune from the 1954 movie Apache, "My Love and I." It's not the most familiar of Great American Songbook compositions, but saxophonist Coleman Hawkins put it on display on his Today and Now (Impulse! Records, 1963), and bassist Charlie Haden covered it with his Quartet West on Sophisticated Ladies (Decca Records, 2011). Harrison, bassist Dave Whitford and drummer Enzo Zirille slow it down to a sensual crawl, wringing every drop of beauty from the melody. Don't open with a ballad unless you can do it this well.

The much covered "I'm Old Fashioned" rides a rhumba groove. Keith Jarrett and his Standard's Trio gave the same treatment to "Poinciana" on their Whisper Not (ECM Records, 2000) set, and here it acts as a perfect step-up-the-pace, brighten-the-room follow-up to the opener.

"Stars" is an abstract Harrison original, a solo piano effort, with delicate notes flashing like

celestial lights blinking on in a dark sky, followed by what must be trio improvisation, the enigmatic "An Evening of Spacehips and UFOs," to let us know this isn't going to be a straight-though standards album—there's going to be more mystery and exploration here. The tune wanders in deep space until a gravitational pull asserts itself, drawing the trio into a groove. The Harrison original, "Io" (one of the planet Jupiter's four Galilean moons) has a subtle, eerie sheen added to the composition's majesty by the addition of Harrison's synthesizer colorings. "Sunrise (Port Meadow)" is bright and hopeful. "BoRG-58" is a prickly, muscular trio improvisation. Johnny Mandel's "Emily" has never sounded lovelier or more lively, with exceptional trio interplay, leading into the disc's closer, Harrison's solo "Stars II," a brief, lean, beautiful rumination.

Lunaris is a marvelous piano trio outing—fresh takes on some of the standards and a bunch of forward-leaning originals by piano star on the rise. ---Dan McLanaghan, allaboutjazz.com

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