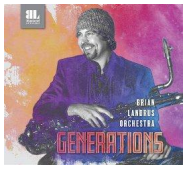
Brian Landrus Orchestra - Generations (2017)



01 Jeru Concerto, Mvt. 1 4:25 02 Jeru Concerto (Interlude) 1:10 03 Jeru Concerto, Mvt. 2 4:11 04 Jeru Concerto, Mvt. 3 4:33 05 Jeru Concerto, Mvt. 4 7:40 06 Orchids 3:23 07 The Warrior 8:41 08 Arrow in the Night 2:49 09 Arise 3:06 10 Human Nature 4:02 11 Ruby 6:16 12 Every Time I Dream 9:04 Brian Landrus - baritone saxophone, bass clarinet, arranger, composer Jamie Baum - flute, alto flute Tom Christensen - oboe, flute Darryl Harper - clarinet Michael Rabinowitz – bassoon Alden Banta – contrabassoon Debbie Schmidt – horn Ralph Alessi – trumpet Igmar Thomas – trumpet Alan Ferber – trombone Marcus Rojas – tuba Brandee Younger – harp Joe Locke – vibraphones Billy Hart – drums Justin Brown – drums Mark Feldman – violin Sara Caswell – violin Joyce Hammann – violin Meg Okura – violin Lois Martin – viola Mora Krohn – viola Jody Redhage – cello Maria Jeffers – cello Jay Anderson - acoustic bass Lonnie Plaxico - acoustic bass, electric bass JC Sanford - conductor

Brian Landrus established himself as a composer of great strength and substance, and rose to his position as one of the foremost low reed specialists on the scene, through albums like the expansive Mirage (Blueland Records, 2013) and the trio-centric The Deep Below (Blueland, Records/Palmetto Records, 2015). But even well wrought and absorbing dates like those don't properly prepare you for this. Generations brings together a twenty-five piece jazz orchestra to realize Landrus' broad-minded, wide-eyed compositions in stunning fashion. We use terms like "breathtaking" and "awe-inspiring" with far too much ease these days, but both tags truly fit here. And you can add "brilliant" to the list.

It's tempting to dub this Third Stream art, boxing it up as we so often like to do with music, but that would be a huge mistake. History has shown us that said category tends to connote ambition or thought outpacing realization, something that surely does not apply here. Generations aspires to great heights and actually reaches them. It's an aural amalgam of incredible beauty, extensive thought, and intricate design, brought to life by a to-die-for cast with a skillful and charismatic leading man.

Landrus' Jeru Concerto—a four-movement work named for his son prior to his birth (and referencing the great Gerry Mulligan's nickname)—serves as the gateway into this orchestral realm. It's neither too plush nor anemic in content, striking a fine balance in shape and substance. The opening movement is propulsive and alluring all at once, as buoyant bass, light and motile drums, sweeping strings, here-and-there reeds and brass, shadowing vibraphone, and other aural accoutrements create a bed for Landrus' richly expressive baritone saxophone. A solo interlude for the leader follows, lighting the way to the wondrous and patient second movement, the sensitive and slow-flowing third movement, and the impactful fourth movement. It took Landrus a year-and-a-half to put this piece together, sussing out ideas on his 1948 Selmer, recording and transcribing the results, harmonizing those ideas, and orchestrating and arranging it all to create the end result. The care behind it all shows in every note and gesture painted across the Jeru Concerto.

While that magnum opus would've been more than enough to gush about, it's only the beginning here. Landrus adds another seven standalone compositions to the program after that, further highlighting his own instrumental voice(s) while showcasing various members of this incredible orchestra. "Orchids" is a beautifully floral piece with a light and slow reggae lilt behind it, building in passion and intensity while highlighting the work of harpist Brandee Younger; "The Warrior," a dedicatory design tipping its hat to Landrus' father, is resolute without ever being aggressive, giving pause to admire the contributions of trumpeter Igmar Thomas among others; "Arise" is an all-inclusive patchwork with a lightly funky groove driving the train; "Ruby," saluting Landrus' daughter by tracing a harmonic growth curve that mirrors her perceived development, shines a spotlight on a handful of heavyweights including vibraphonist Joe Locke; and the haunting "Every Time I Dream" uses Locke's poignant vibes voice, the leader's bass clarinet, and trumpeter Ralph Alessi's horn to light the way. Landrus' next level thinking, strong writing chops, and instrumental prowess, coupled with the contributions of his all-star assemblage, put Generations into a category all its own. It's a nonpareil work of high art destined for many a "best of" list. ---Dan Bilawsky, allaboutjazz.com

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