

Art Hirahara
Noble Path

POSI-TONE 8074
 ★★½

Some piano players just feel good. Count Basie was a master of subtle humor. Cedar Walton added a unique melodic twist to inventive progressions (and it feels good). Roger Kellaway, Red Garland, Vince Guaraldi and such contemporary players as Geoffrey Keezer exemplify an effervescent, forward motion approach that, in contrast to sounding “soulful” or cerebral, simply releases musical endorphins.

Add San Francisco native Art Hirahara to that short list. Moving to New York City in 2003, Hirahara has animated performances by Stacey Kent, Dave Douglas, Vincent Herring, Jenny Scheinman and Fred Ho, among others. Hirahara’s debut, *Edge Of This Earth*, was released in 2000. So why is Hirahara such a relative secret? His playing is sparkling, as are his compositions. Performed in trio format, *Noble Path* is loosely straightahead, with quick melodies, and driven by Hirahara’s vivacious playing, which always connects the dots in a flowing way. Hirahara fires the keys, but with a sense of inner calm and a lithe touch, propelling his trio through rubato statements, thoughtful but never melancholic ballads and



chunky uptempo swingers that exude improvisation and inspiration. Duke Ellington’s “Isfahan” is playful and luminous, a showcase for Hirahara’s improvisations that span moody lower-register dissonances to childlike twinkles.

Hirahara seems to draw from a bottomless wellspring of ideas, often layering chords to build tension or rolling the entire length of the keyboard in melodic freedom. His playing is consistently compelling, and always swinging.

—Ken Micallef

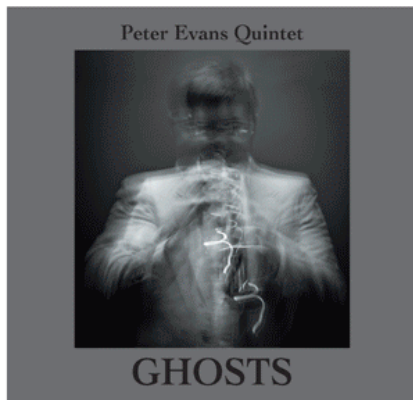
Noble Path: I’m OK; All Or Nothing At All; Stood Down; Ebb And Flow; Noble Path; Con Alma; Peace Unknown; Change Your Look; Isfahan; Nocturne; Vast; Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye. (63:13)
Personnel: Art Hirahara, piano; Yoshi Waki, bass; Dan Aran, drums.
Ordering info: posi-tone.com

Peter Evans Quintet
Ghosts

MORE IS MORE 111
 ★★★★★

In the quartet Mostly Other People Do The Killing, trumpeter Peter Evans breathlessly demonstrates a cool mastery of numerous mainstream jazz styles while serving up a maverick’s challenge to the music’s orthodoxy. On *Ghosts*, the stunning new album by his current quintet, he engages bop history in a different way, merging a respect for tradition with explicitly forward-looking modes of improvisation and compositional hybrids. Rather than writing new tunes based on the changes of old standards, Evans reinvents the Mel Tormé classic “Christmas Song” by leaving the harmony intact, but cramming in tons of extra notes into the spaces in the original melody, while the title piece tweaks the Victor Young standard “I Don’t Stand A Ghost Of A Chance With You” with a shadowy glimmer of the original piece.

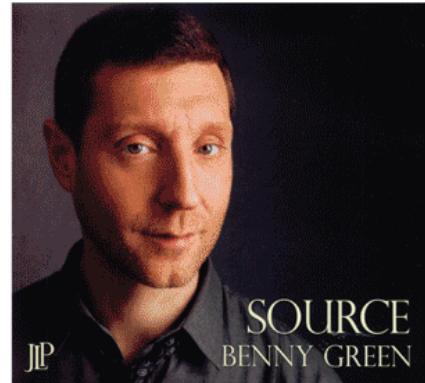
Sam Pluta’s live processing is the group’s ace in the hole, whether that means he’s rapidly refracting, dicing and/or reconfiguring the improvised acoustic lines of his cohorts, creating a multiplying effect on the leader’s bold trumpet playing, or dropping in some nostalgically repurposed string samples, as he does with the title track. But in his compositions and arrangements. Evans is often doing something



bling the opening motif of his “Chorales” when it comes around in the second section of the piece, or directing his excellent rhythm section (drummer Jim Black, bassist Tom Blancarte, pianist Carlos Homs) to accelerate and decelerate the form of “...One To Ninety-Two” to accommodate shifting, asymmetrically long harmonic movement. As heady as Evans gets with his ideas, the music still hits on a visceral, ferociously swinging level, arriving a futuristic hard-bop shattered by abstract electronics, free-jazz daring and nonchalant technical virtuosity.

—Peter Margasak

Ghosts: ...One To Ninety-Two; 323; Ghost; The Big Crunch; Chorales; Articulation; Stardust. (57:38)
Personnel: Peter Evans, trumpets; Carlos Homs, piano; Tom



Benny Green
Source

JAZZ LEGACY PRODUCTIONS 1001014
 ★★★★★

In the liner notes to *Source*, his first trio album more than 10 years, Benny Green writes that he wanted to make “a real and honest jazz record.” If that means Green, who is joined by the incomparable bass/drums tandem of Peter Washington and Kenny Washington, intended to record a hard swinging and exceptionally well executed album that gives its listeners a clinic in hard bop, then he succeeded. Aptly titled, *Source* contains inspired performances of numerous bop masterpieces, such as Bud Powell’s “Tempus Fugit,” Horace Silver’s “Opus De Funk” and Duke Pearson’s “Chant.” Green also provides sensitive readings of Dizzy Gillespie’s ballad “I Waited For You” and Mel Tormé’s “Born To Be Blue.” Green and company consistently churn out creative and fresh takes of these well-trod nuggets, making *Source* anything but a generic repertory album.

Green, who has never lacked for chops, takes a slightly different approach on *Source* than I’ve heard from him in the past. His strong touch remains, but he now relies more on single-note melodic lines than heavy and dense block chords and voicings. Green’s versatility is on display throughout, whether bringing a bluesy funk to Kenny Drew’s “Cool Green,” mixing up phrase lengths and turning the beat around on “Blue Minor,” or teasing out nimble and fleeting octave runs on the tidy “Tempus Fugit.” He also exhibits a pensive melancholy on the ballads, letting chords and single notes breathe, ringing luminously. Peter Washington, who contributes numerous excellent solos throughout, and Kenny Washington, whose brushwork on “Way ‘Cross Town” is especially tasty, work together as one; it’s doubtful that any bassist and drummer swing and drive a group better. This is a fantastic trio and an excellent record.

—Chris Robinson

Source: Blue Minor; Way ‘Cross Town; I Waited For You; Little T; Cool Green; Tempus Fugit; Park Avenue Petite; Chant; Born To Be Blue; Opus De Funk. (53:52)
Personnel: Benny Green, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Kenny

similar to Pluta, whether that means scam-

Blancarte, bass; Jim Black, drums; Sam Pluta, live processing.
Ordering info: moreisnorecords.com

Washington, drums.
Ordering info: jazzlegacyproductions.com