



- ***CD Review: The Song Is You 'Tribute to Lawrence G. Williams'***

Lorelei Clarke, Jazz Review; Feb 1, 2008

This recording was the dying wish of drummer, pianist, and composer Lawrence Williams, a close friend of Michele Ramo and Marcus Belgrave. With this higher purpose in mind, the two friends set out to fulfill William's request, and created this rewarding and passionate album with the rather rare duo of guitar and trumpet. The added emotion behind this album's creation is evident from the first notes. Opening with Oscar Hammerstein's "The Song Is You", Belgrave begins with a light solo and is joined by Ramo's walking bass line. The breathy trumpet tones float seamlessly over the mellow plucking. The guitar Ramo plays on this recording is one of his own invention, an 8-stringed combination of guitar and bass called the "Hei-D Mostro". During Ramo's solo, it's hard to believe there is only one instrument playing, as the bass notes so often compliment his solo lines. He does a good job of switching up rhythms during Belgrave's solo as well. Ramo contributes one of his own compositions to the album in "A Song For A True Artist". Beginning with a soft, Latin line, Ramo takes the background to Belgrave as he comes in with a haunting, lyrical melody.

The resolutions in the melody are almost heartbreaking, blending richly with the guitar undertones. Belgrave's sparing use of vibrato adds to the effect beautifully. Ramo at times sounds as if he were playing a harp rather than a guitar, with several swift scalar lines. Belgrave imitates these lines in his own, creating an effect like a round as the two carry on in true duet fashion. The effect is one of longing, but not of sadness per say. The song is a true lament, a remembrance of something that was lost. This album would be incomplete, however, without a song by the one who inspired its creation. Lawrence Williams's "Number 6" (which cleverly enough is track #7 on the album) is a perfect outlet for Ramo and Belgrave's creativity. Beginning with another beautiful solo trumpet line, the guitar has freedom to compliment and ad-lib as willed. Ramo chooses to add some more harp-like, cascading lines behind the ethereal sound of Belgrave's flugelhorn. While Belgrave sets the mood and tone of the piece, Ramo adds color and texture. Ramo takes an extended solo in this piece as well that includes some strictly bass work as well as some interesting rhythmic patterns. Belgrave's solo livens things up a bit as he throws in some bebop licks over Ramo's smooth Latin patterns. One of the best songs of the album, however, has to be "What A Wonderful World", where Belgrave's vocal solo is reminiscent of the same done by Louis Armstrong. The ever-popular melody that we hear so often is given a new frame of reference when played with so passionately.

While this can be said for the whole album, this selection seems to embody it so very well. From the first note to the last, it's obvious how much of themselves these two artists have put into this recording. They've done much more than realizing a friend's last wish; they have honored him royally.

Tracks: The Song Is You, A Song For A True Artist, Where Are You, East of the Sun (West of the Moon), If You Could See Me Now, Angel Eyes, Number 6, Teach Me Tonight, What A Wonderful World