

Alon Nechushtan 'Venture Bound' July 2014 Jazz Inside by Scott Yanow

Venture Bound - Enja 9603 – www.enjarecords.com Lavventura; The Gratitude Suite; Pome (Grenades); Dark Damsel; Sneak Peak; Haunted Blues; Snow-Flow; F.A.Q; Serpentrails

PERSONNEL: Alan Nechushtan, piano; Donny McCaslin or John Ellis, tenor; Chris Lightcap, bass; Adam Cruz, drums; Duane Eubanks, trumpet; Roggerio Boccato, percussion; Brahim Brigbane, oud

Alon Nechushtan is a creative modern jazz pianist who, while inspired by his Israeli background and by post-bop jazz, has his own voice both as a pianist and as a composer. He moved to New York over a decade ago and has since performed with such notables as Don Byron, William Parker, Bob Moses, Ben Allison, Francisco Mela, Andy Statman, Chris Cheek, Chris Speed, Andrew Cyrille, the Frank London Trio, and Daniel Carter's Quartet in addition to Klezmer bands and with avant-garde players.

Nechushtan has led his own albums since 2004. Some of his music has mixed together jazz with Klezmer and Middle Eastern rhythms and grooves. He has composed new works for a wide variety of ensembles including for bass and electronics (Dark Forces), for saxophone quartet, and for larger bands, dance companies, visual artists, and soundtracks.

Venture Bound, Alan Nechushtan's eight CD as a leader, teams him with top musicians from New York. Most of the selections feature him in a quartet with bassist Chris Lightcap, drummer Adam Cruz and either John Ellis or Donny McCaslin on tenor. Ellis and McCaslin alternate throughout the set with Ellis on five of the nine selections and McCaslin on the other four. Two songs also include trumpeter Duane Eubanks while percussionist Roggerio Boccato and Brahim Brigbane on oud appear on one selection apiece.

In the brief liner notes Alon Nechushtan says that "Each of the songs presented here is an homage, gratitude or tribute to some of my favorite pianists and composers." Unfortunately he does not say who the tributes are honoring but it ultimately does not matter because the music is so rewarding.

The opening "L'Avventura" features Nechushtan and John Ellis soloing over a fast 6/4 groove, playing music that is both adventurous and accessible. On "The Gratitude Suite," the group effortlessly plays in 7/4. The long melody and the harmonies will remind one of the Middle East but the playing is definitely American-based jazz. McCaslin takes an excellent solo and Nechushtan, jamming over some unusual accents by Lightcap and Cruz, makes mincemeat of the 7/4 time.

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On the uptempo "Pome (Grenades)," Nechushtan really tears into the piece, displaying both virtuosity and a steady stream of creative ideas. "Dark Damsel" has a spot for Brigbone's oud along with some dynamic tenor playing by McCaslin. "Sneak Peak" is a fast jazz waltz that inspires some heated solos. "Haunted Blues" is the most traditional sounding piece on the CD, a soulful number on which Nechushtan early in his solo even quotes Dizzy Gillespie's "Good Bait." Duane Eubanks makes his second appearance on this selection.

"Snow-Flow" is taken in a fast 5/4 time and is most notable for John Ellis' fluent soprano solo. The lyrical "F.A.Q." and "Serpentrails" (based on Thelonious Monk's "Ask Me Now") conclude the well-rounded set.

Venture Sound gives one a good sampling of today's modern jazz scene and it is an excellent example of the artistry of Alon Nechushtan.

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