



From The Hip
David Kikoski/Dave Carpenter/
Gary Novak/Bob Sheppard (BFM Jazz)
by Tom Conrad

This perfectly recorded session happened in 2006, in producer/engineer George Klabin's private studio in Beverly Hills, in front of a live audience. In his liner notes, saxophonist Bob Sheppard describes it as a "bantering about in a deeply rich shared vocabulary... with no rehearsal or even a talk through." Four cats, a band for one day, rethinking nine standards. Jazz is art of the moment, but when everything works, it sounds foreordained.

David Kikoski may not have played more piano on record. His trio feature, "If You Could See Me Now", is stunning in its diversity and comprehensiveness, evolving from lush to spare to deep in a groove to floating to fractured, all without losing the thread of Tadd Dameron's great song. Kikoski provides luminosity and buoyancy for this music. Bassist Dave Carpenter and drummer Gary Novak provide its counterpoise of relaxation and intensity.

But Sheppard is the primary reason every one of these familiar songs sounds fresh. On "Star Eyes" he hovers over the melody and descends to touch it barely here and there. "How Deep Is the Ocean" is implied

more than stated, in snatches and fragments. "Autumn Leaves" also sustains a casual relationship to its form, always there, but as an intermittent subtext to the new songs that Sheppard and Kikoski and Carpenter come upon. (Carpenter's untimely death shortly after this session was a tragic loss for jazz.) Sheppard rides air currents in a levitational opening cadenza, then swoops down into "My One and Only Love". The design is ornate. The passion is genuine, although measured and dignified.

Sheppard is a new millennium version of a West Coast tenor player. His light tone and subtlety place him in a lineage with Bill Perkins and Bob Cooper. But his version of lyricism is too complicated, with too many hard turns, to belong in the "Cool School".

For more information, visit bfmjazz.com. Kikoski is at *Smalls Nov. 25th-26th*. See Calendar.



Free Flying
Fred Hersch/Julian Lage (Palmetto)
by Andrew Vélez

Radiant is the word that comes to mind to describe *Free Flying*, a duo between pianist Fred Hersch and guitarist Julian Lage. Once upon a time both were childhood prodigies. Now at nearly 57 and 25,

respectively, the mutually inspirational effect of their excellent musicianship permeates this live recording. It is music steeped in a sense of adventurous immediacy between two exceptional players who trust each other.

Hersch's gifts as a composer are widely acknowledged as well his status as one of the outstanding musicians of his generation. All but two of the pieces included here are his own. The opener is "Song Without Words #4: Duet". It shifts from a Philip Glass-like beginning to a melodious river-like outpouring from Hersch. When Lage slips in, it is with such a nearly imperceptible subtlety that at first it feels as if he had emerged out of Hersch's keyboard. Here and throughout theirs is a conversation that revels in melodic ideas and rhythmic play.

"Down Home" switches to a funkier barrelhouse mood with some hymn-like moments. Hersch's playing has a strong sense of narrative; we are hearing a fully expressed story, which just doesn't happen to have words. When Lage joins in, it's with a sound that Hersch has remarked is "both solid and transparent". The skillful delicacy of Lage's partnering is especially evident as he emerges and then recedes in "Beatrice". It's distinct and yet complements Hersch's jazzy blues.

The title tune, dedicated to Egberto Gismonti, could as easily be a tribute to Bach. It's yet another expression of the seemingly infinite variety of Hersch's virtuoso playing. Once again the interplay is exceptional. Each player seems to be inspiring the other with ebullient wordless suggestions of "What about this?" and "Try that!". Spirited, lyrical and intimate, *Free Flying* is an occasion for hurrahs and repeated listenings.

For more information, visit palmetto-records.com. This duo is at *Blue Note Nov. 25th-27th*. See Calendar.

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