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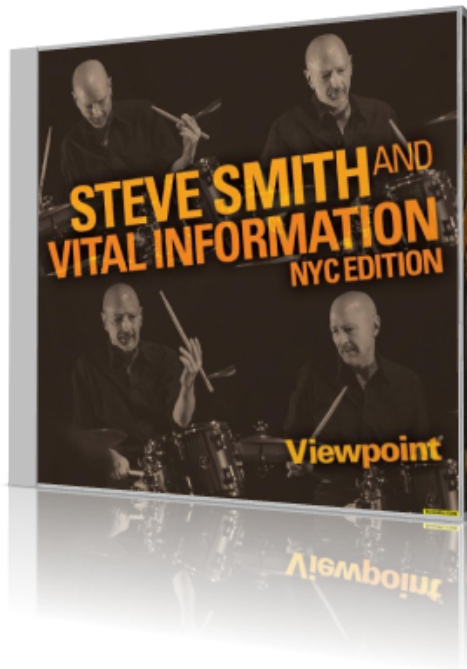
STEVE SMITH AND VITAL INFORMATION NYC EDITION Viewpoint

Modern Drummer Hall of Fame inductee Steve Smith says of his 2015 rendering of *Vital Information* that it's the "best of all worlds." His extensive experience and culling of New York-area jazz musicians bring us *Viewpoint* (BFM Jazz, 2015) by Steve Smith and Vital Information NYC Edition.

Vital Information NYC Edition are Mark Soskin, piano and Fender Rhodes; Baron Browne, bass; Andy Fusco, alto sax; and Vinny Valentino, guitar. Walt Weiskopf, tenor sax, appears on two tracks.

"Time Check" is one of two songs from the Buddy Rich playbook. One can almost see Buddy during Smith's solo introduction. Soskin cuts loose on the Fender Rhodes, while Browne and Valentino get their licks in. Things heat up when Fusco and Weiskopf get busy for some rapid-fire phrasing. While the alto stretches out, the others do plenty to make sure listeners remain aware of their presence. Just before the end of the piece, Smith pays homage to Rich with a "stop what you're doing and take notice" solo.

Weiskopf also sits in on "Willowcrest," another Buddy Rich specialty. The guitar and alto combine for the melody, with the tenor harmonizing. The synchronization is superb. While the horns and guitar are out front most of the way, Smith's play during the middle passage is a major highlight.



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“Viewpoint One” and “Viewpoint Two” are what Smith calls motif-based solos that he performs with mallets. “A Final Viewpoint” is an improvisation he played while getting drums sounds. Smith says he came up with the name because, depending on your viewpoint, “you can hear the rhythms I’m playing in different ways.”

As if all that weren’t enough, the album ends with two live recordings, “The Blackhawk” and “The Bottom Line,” which capture these musicians in a freer setting.

Smith has led several assemblies of Vital Information since the 1980s, and the combos known as Buddy’s Buddies, musicians who had played with Buddy Rich. Smith also spent nine years as drummer for the rock group, Journey

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