

Marge Hofacre's

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The Fred Hughes Trio Out of the Blue
Self Produced (70:12)

(Fred Hughes, piano; Tom Williams, bass;
Keith Killgo, drums)

Out of the Blue; Desert Aire; How It
Could Be; Night and Day; Tamana; Tokyo
Subway; New Worlds; It Could Happen to
You; Round Midnight

In the Talent Deserving Wider Recognition category, we have the Fred Hughes Trio out of Maryland. While the individual members seem to have achieved regional recognition by free-lancing around Washington D.C. at such venues as Kennedy Center, Blues Alley, George Mason University and BET on Jazz, they deserve more.

While I normally look askance at liner notes, Fred Hughes' self-penned description is absolutely, if immodestly, correct when he writes that "Occasionally you have the chance to play with a group of musicians where everything just clicks perfectly." Yes, the group's cohesion and mutual respect are notable.

Fred Hughes leads on piano with an intelligence and empathy that allows for individual expression from Tom Williams on bass and Keith Killgo on drums as well—not just in breaks but as individual melodic soloists. In fact, the trio format allows the space and as-necessary quietude to bring out the contributions of the entire group.

Tom Williams wrote three of the compositions on the album—"Desert Aire", "Tamana," and "New Worlds" - and as you would expect, they include extended thematic developments on bass wherein Hughes lays back for accompaniment.

The contrasts here are notable as well. For when Hughes starts out the album with a contemplative minor-keyed rumble in his tune, "Out of the Blue", the listener expects heightened expressiveness that fails to fall into a groove. But that's exactly what "Out of the Blue" does as a minor-keyed romp.

Then we have "Tokyo Subway," which is out of the gate with Killgo's funk rhythm. Having been one of the founding members of Donald Byrd's Blackbyrds, with whom he spent 10 years, Killgo has a propulsiveness that isn't surprising as he like-mindedly comments upon Hughes' jaunty but never-less-than-swinging phrases that increase in intensity and volume throughout the tune. But Killgo possesses a subtlety as well as he *does* surprise with a drum roll in the middle of "It Could Happen to You". In fact, the roll is so softly audible that it sounds as if the song has ended until Killgo leads the group back into the theme again and ends with a percussive flourish.

If I have to be picky—because isn't that what we reviewers are paid to do?—I'd have to admit that a Latinized "Round Midnight" isn't my cup of tea. But then, who needs another repetition of the same interpretations we've heard a hundred times before? And the musicianship continues unabated throughout the concept, like it or not.

One more note about the production value of this CD: I would have expected lower sound quality, but the sound clarity of this self-produced certainly achieve the fidelity of a major-label release, from the snapping of the bass strings to the swirling separation of the cymbals through both speakers. And Hughes is correct to use the liner notes to thank his friend Louis at Warm Valley Studio for the use of the Steinway. It sounds excellent.

To order, contact: Fred Hughes; fax 410-360-1863; email 74453.1407@Compuserve.com.

Bill Donaldson