

JazzTimes review (November 2004)

There is a small, specialized subgenre of jazz that occurs when out-cats decide to come in from the cold and play it (relatively) straight for a tune or two. (Think Eric Dolphy exhausting “You Don’t Know What Love Is” on *Last Date*, or Alben Ayler croaking “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen.”) The fun comes from the tension created by turmoil under voluntary temporary restraint.

Nod has some of that tension (and fun). Jessica Jones and her husband, Tony Jones, are perhaps the only avant-garde, tenor-sax playing man-and-wife tandem in jazz. Their 15-year track record revolves around experimental composition, freer forms and collective improvisation. But the Joneses planned *Nod* as “a tribute to the jazz guys (and gals) in the lineage.” The result is an approachable, intriguing album, full of surprise and positive energy.

The quartet includes drummer Derrek Phillips and the adventurous, articulate bassist Ken Filiano. On originals like “Manhattan” and covers like Jackie McLean’s “Little Melonae” (in a stark, aslant arrangement by Tony), this ensemble is a lean machine, with both Jessica and Tony shooting sharp, impulsive, coherent ideas.

*Nod*’s program is varied by the addition of guests on five of the eight tracks: Connie Crothers on piano, Joseph Jarman on reeds and vocals, Mark Taylor on French horn and the Jones’ children on vocals. Jessica’s “Waynopolis” is an in-depth 11-minute “nod” to Wayne Shorter, with solos by Taylor, one of the tenors (presumably Jessica), and Filiano – all liberated, all relevant to the Shorter-esque subject matter. Crothers’ “Bird’s Word” is another loose, springy exercise, interrupted and stimulated by the composer’s jarring, clanging piano.

The Jones’ worst decision was to have Joseph Jarman sing on “Happiness Is.” Their best decision was to record at Systems Two in Brooklyn, where so many good-sounding albums come from. – Thomas Conrad