

NEW ISSUES

IAN TORDELLA MAGNOLIA CIRCUMVENTION 58

MAGNOLIA / D'S MELODY
/ LIAM'S SONG / THE WAY
THROUGH / SHADOW DANCING
/ THE RED DOT / THE FALL GUY.
52:25.

Tordella, ts; Florian Weber, p;
Jeff Miles, g; Jeff Denson, b;
Brian McLaughlin, d. June & July
2009, San Diego, CA.



Eric Person by John Herr

date' was true. I still don't find this CD or his singing memorable, but he is indeed improving: his singing is sincere; his enunciation clear; he's on pitch. He has surrounded himself with many distinguished players, among them the fine pianist Craig Larson. If the result is never particularly original, Wood offers competent readings of familiar material; perhaps he can go on from this to be more creative rather than following well-trodden paths. For once, I am hopeful.

Michael Steinman

Tenor saxophonist Ian Tordella wields his horn in the soulful Hard Bop style established by men like Hank Mobley, Joe Henderson, and early John Coltrane. Most of the songs are his own tasty if familiar-sounding originals, with bassist Denson contributing the tricky "Shadow Dancing," which elicits one of Tordella's best solos of the album. One thing that Tordella's compositions and solo work share is the use of the extreme upper range of his horn. It's one of those techniques that either sounds just right or gets on your nerves. Unfortunately, it's the latter case here. Just about every one of his frequent but brief forays into the stratosphere is grating and strained, in contrast to the warmly rounded sound he gets in the middle and bottom of his range. The title track opens the disc with its bright melody and an insistent beat. "D's Melody" is dark and moody, with a ruminative solo by Tordella and a mildly hyperactive one by the underused Miles on guitar. Pianist Weber, a bit florid on "Magnolia," steps out on "Liam's Song" with an energized solo egged along by drummer McLaughlin, whose complex rhythms drive the music unerringly forward at any tempo. Tordella digs in nicely on the light funk of "The Way Through," but oh, those high notes ... "The Red Dot" tries something a little different with a tense and quiet arrangement for the rhythm section while Tordella grows heated on top. For once, his pinched tone works, and his emotional peaks feel earned. The bass solo by Denson that follows slows things down to a crawl, with McLaughlin gamely trying to keep the momentum going. Tordella reenters to bring the piece to an upbeat close. The saxophonist relaxes a bit on the closer, "The Fall Guy," with its herky-jerky rhythms and vague second line feel. I admire Tordella for extending the tenor in a thoughtful and dedicated way, but that feeling only goes so far when my ears rebel at the sounds that result.

Stuart Kremsky