

P I N N A C L E

The Ted Howe Jazz Orchestra

Featuring John Patitucci



Jazz Profiles

By Steven A. Cerra

When I received my copy of *Pinnacle* featuring the music of the Ted Howe Orchestra, it brought back many happy memories of the Herb Pomeroy Big Band.

“Pinnacle, Ted Howe's newest CD, features his 13 piece jazz orchestra and showcases five original extended pieces composed and arranged by Howe.

With its beautiful melodies, rich textures, high energy, and virtuosic performances, this recording is intense and exciting while remaining highly accessible. Howe is a Los Angeles-based pianist, composer, arranger, producer, and teacher. Pinnacle is his seventh CD as a leader and showcases his strength as a melodist and his broad knowledge and command of many diverse musical traditions.

Howe's approach to arranging was greatly influenced by the late Herb Pomeroy, the well-respected trumpet player, arranger, and eminent jazz music educator at Boston's renowned Berklee College of Music. Pomeroy, Howe's friend and teacher, developed a method of arranging now widely known as "Herbie's Line Writing Course" that was inspired by his love of Duke Ellington's music and arranging techniques. (Herb never stopped studying The Duke's music.)

Howe's compositions touch on a wide range of styles, including swing, funk, and Latin, among others. The many time signature changes catch the listener by pleasant surprise.

Howe's harmonization technique employs more of a horizontal, linear approach commonly used in classical music. His horn voicings and subtle use of dissonance create mysterious overtones that make his 13 piece ensemble sound as big as an 18-20 piece big band, but with far fewer musicians.

Like Ellington, who adapted classical music forms and techniques to jazz and wrote many extended compositions and "suites," Howe includes on this release a jazz suite with three distinct movements. There are also four other pieces that closely hew to the classical paradigm, all providing the space for these superb musicians to express themselves within the framework of these challenging compositions.

According to Howe, "These pieces aren't just about the music; they're also about the instruments, the varied combinations of sound they make, and how great musicians can rise to just about any challenge and take the music to new and exciting places.

Take, for example, the opening piece, "Presto for Two Trombones" which features Los Angeles trombonists Andy Martin and Francisco Torres. This is a very challenging piece for slide trombone players, especially the solo section, where these two virtuosos rip through the very fast modal section. The inimitable John Patitucci also adds some heat to this piece with his own lightning fast solo.

Howe cites Chris Botti as the inspiration for "Impromptu for Trumpet," a sweetly melodic number that belies the tune's difficult chord changes. Lester Walker's beautiful interpretation deftly rises to the challenge.

The core of this project is the "Suite #1 for Jazz Orchestra." This piece premiered in 2011 at the Conant Arts Center in Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, GA.

The three movements are based solely on a single four-bar motif using many of the time signatures, styles and instruments usually used in jazz.

Howe showcases his own playing in the lovely "Adagio for Piano." His touch is light and graceful on this piece, the second of the only two numbers which he plays on in this project.

The final work on this disc is "Jazz Etude for Three Clarinets," featuring solos by Sam Skelton on Eb clarinet, and John Patitucci on bass. This intriguing piece is characterized by the frequent use of diminished chords which create tension and an interesting, intense display of dissonance.

Currently based in Los Angeles, Howe lived in Atlanta for many years. He has performed with and/or produced for many well-known artists, including Mel Torme, Lainie Kazan, Cherly Bentyne (of the Manhattan Transfer), Dave Weckl, Joe LaBarbera, and Tom Kennedy, among others. He travels around the country performing his two very popular shows, "An Evening of Duke Ellington," and "Shaken Not Stirred: The Music of James Bond.

Howe has also produced three other well-reviewed CDs as a leader on the Summit Records label, "Ellington," "Love Song," and "Elton Exposed," which became a big hit on the official Elton John Fan Club web site -- a rarity for any jazz CD!

Pinnacle is a marvelous work from a mature artist who clearly has an ear for beautiful melodies and great respect for and knowledge of musical traditions.

This CD will certainly expose Howe's achievements and talents as a musician and composer to a much wider audience, which he so richly deserves.

Pinnacle is available on Amazon, I-Tunes and Summit Records.com.

-Steven A. Cerra/Jazz Profiles