

DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond Since 1934

December 2015

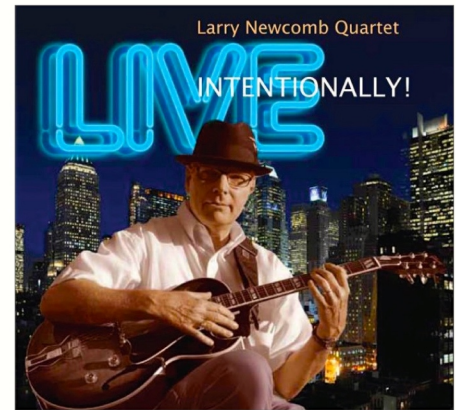
**Selected as one of DOWNBEAT's
Best New Albums of 2015**

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Larry Newcomb Quartet *Live Intentionally!*

ESSENTIAL MESSENGER 12015

★★★★

This disc from New York guitarist and educator Larry Newcomb is a typical post-bop straight-ahead format—a quartet date with plenty of solo turns for everybody (except maybe drummer Jimmy Madison, who makes his authoritative presence felt in other ways). So there's a comfortable familiarity here. But what returns pleasure on multiple listens is the way everyone involved makes the familiar sound brand-new.

That's especially true of the leader, with his fluid attack and varied phrasing. Listen to the bluesy bends on his slow phrasing of “Stardust.” For that matter, on the same tune, pianist Eric Olsen's voice-leading would make Hank Jones smile. The Kern-Hammerstein chestnut “All The Things You Are” opens with a guitar-piano duo full of contrapuntal lines before settling into an easy waltz groove.

On “Instant Water” (one of three originals on the nine-track set), paraphrase is raised to a high art, as both piano and guitar, and then bass (Dmitri Kolesnik), seem to reveal another level of depth to the piece on every chorus of their solos, always keeping the beautifully crafted melody within easy earshot.

Another original, the medium-up-tempo “Thanks Jack!,” sports a sprightly extended guitar-piano unison line, as well as a sturdy AABA structure that should make it a favorite in Newcomb's book. Here Madison is at his best, punctuating the end of a phrase with a single soft-ringing cymbal hit, or playing the rhythm of the melody along with the soloist for a few bars.

The album title, by the way, refers not to a club date, but to Newcomb's intention to record live in the studio, without the “safety net” of overdubs, for maximum creative spontaneity in real time. He's succeeded.

—Jon Garelick