

Review from blueswax.com

Beatnik Jungle, (02/11/09)

After miles of traveling to thousands of gigs with the Tommy Castro Band, sax man Keith Crossan finally decided to make his own statement. The glorious results can be heard on his debut recording, *Beatnik Jungle*. According to Crossan the title refers to an area in San Francisco called North Beach, which is where the Tommy Castro Band got its start. It was also a place where poets and writers of the 1960s Beat era created their craft, in fact till this day North Beach is still a place that thrives with great writers, poets, painters, and musicians.

From the get-go the all instrumental *Beatnik Jungle* captivates the listeners ears with the high-flying "Turk's Groove," which is reminiscent of the great Swing that Roomful of Blues used to deliver. "Out The Gate" is marvelous with its super-funky Oakland groove that is magnificently written and performed and it's easily my favorite track on this recording. Crossan relates that "Clemency" was written with Clarence Clemons in mind; it's a Blues tune that offers similarity to Clemons' full-throated sax wailing that starts off slowly and boils to solid groove, which gives me the notion of Crossan's affection for the late great King Curtis.

"Paris" is a beautiful tune that features lush strings and a great trumpet solo by Tom Poole, trombonist Mike Rinta (who co-arranged all of the fabulous horn charts on *Beatnik Jungle* with Crossan), and keyboard player Austin de Lone, who solos through the fade, thus making "Paris" a pretty jazzy affair.

The title track is a big band Funk and grinding tune that features the vibes of Geoff Palmer, Crossan's hip flute, plus tremendous and powerful horn charts. "Blues for Mianna" is appropriately a slow Blues that is introduced by a slick and tasteful bass intro by Castro's former bass player Randy McDonald, followed by a subtle piano solo by de Lone, an interesting guitar solo by Mr. Castro, who definitely takes it up a notch on this otherwise easygoing and sweet Blues groove. It also features outstanding horn charts and an extremely tasty horn section ending that kind of nicely caught me off guard, but it's definitely very cool.

"Huggy Bare" is another funky romp with great changes and a smoking horn section that should have you moving and grooving. Check out the pulsating bass line that Randy McDonald soars into midway, which sets off sparks for Crossan's intense sax solo that is further fueled by more superb horn charts.

Beatnik Jungle closes with the gorgeous and Country-ish "Belle Of Calpella" that features the sweet pedal steel playing by Joel Jaffe (who also co-produced *Beatnik Jungle* with Crossan), and some understated harp work from none other than the multi-instrument playing bandleader Keith Crossan.

Kudos to Keith Crossan for making one my favorite recordings of 2008. The musicianship is well above par, the songs (all written by Crossan) are first rate, the arrangements are top shelf, and the production value is outstanding. Here's to Keith Crossan for making a very strong statement for the music he obviously loves and for taking a departure from what he does so well in the Tommy Castro's band. If I had one complaint about *Beatnik Jungle* that would be that I found it a bit short, as it clocks in at a little over thirty-three minutes, but I ain't complaining as *Beatnik Jungle* is one of the most pleasant sounding surprises for me of 2008. One last thought; let's just hope that Keith Crossan follows up *Beatnik Jungle* with at least one more extraordinary recording, as I would certainly look forward to hearing more from the musical mind and solid reed playing by Keith Crossan! *Beatnik Jungle* falls under the esteemed category of highly recommended listening. Enjoy!

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