

Review "Open Up"

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In the vane of Joe Pass and Wes Montgomery, jazz guitarist Jeff Barone has mastered the finer points of the instrument's assets. He draws out a funky essence in its chord inflections on "Duban's Groove" with the inborn faculty of Ron Smith and the savvy vivaciousness of Dee Brown on the Latin sweetened "New Samba." Both are original scores composed by Barone. The liquefied notations of "If You Go Away" feel like malleable putty in Barone's hands, shaping the progressions into floating silhouettes and easing into the transitions with a mental road map that has a cognizance of the in's and out's of melodic patterns that work prodigiously together.

Barone's tunes relate to the jazz club environment with uptempo jam moments like in the title track "Open Up" as the organ, horns, and guitar trade off riffs creating high-spirited dynamics. The panegyric quality of Barone's playing in "Jenna's Song" has a loving auditory as his guitar chords cuddle beautifully along the melodic reels. It feels like a nighttime lullaby, which strolls nonchalantly into Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart sumptuous tune "Falling In Love With Love" which Barone serves with laid back treatments that present a luau ambience scaffold in percolating organ keys and guitar riffs that exhibit a dance-jazz limberness. Still in the dance-jazz region but more for cocktail hour is "Here's That Rainy Day" originally written by Jimmy Van Heusen and Johnny Burke. Barone's rendition has a reposing organ that couples with the gleefully waddling guitar notes as the punctuating saxophone twirls spray fragrantly along the melodic folds. The bebop vibe of Burton Lane and Frank Loesser's classic tune "I Hear Music" will keep your feet dancing to its upbeat jive as "My Funny Valentine," also written by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, is amicably done with an instinct for accentuating the listening pleasure of the melody.

Barone's talent extends to being able to carry out a complete tune like "My Funny Valentine" all by himself. It is a rare guitarist that has confidence enough to play a melody without any accompaniment and still capture the audiences' attention. Barone's ability marks him in the elite class of contemporary jazz guitarists relatable to Si Hayden and Enrico Granafei. The ascending and descending scales of "Toys," an original work of Herbie Hancock, are so perfectly placed that the sequences tickle your tummy instead of making you feel seasick. Barone's knack for assembling the arrangements takes into account the listening experience for his audiences, and the need to make it as pleasing as possible like in the comely chord sequences of "Quiet Now," originally composed by Denny Zeitlin. Barone revisits "Falling In Love With Love" on the final track with a steeper lounge jazz vibe, and the dulcet register of the organ having a more pronounced presence.

Jeff Barone grew up in Upstate New York where he received a Bachelor of Music Education from Ithaca College and later a Master of Music degree in guitar from the Manhattan School of Music in 1995. Since then, he has been a backup guitarist for a number of notable jazz artists including Tom Harrell, Reuben Wilson, Bob Mintzer, Jimmy Lovelace, and Warren Chaisson. Barone released his first solo album in 2003 entitled *Crazy Talk*. The positive response he received for *Crazy Talk* fueled his second solo expedition *Open Up*. Produced by Barone and co-produced by his guitarist Jack Wilkins, *Open Up* is rich in adult contemporary and cocktail jazz vestments. The music creates an affable and relaxing setting that lets you enjoy being with the company you're in, wherever that might be.