

Javier Santiago *Phoenix*

ROPEADOPE 411

★★★½

Javier Santiago's Ropeadope debut is an otherworldly pastiche of electronic music and jazz rhythms, stemming from the mythical theme of the Phoenix. Santiago's keyboard style moves from synthesized alliterations to the sound of his Rhodes, making the album diverse, but not disjointed.

The collection, according to the bandleader, came as a response to his experiences dealing with death. So, Santiago called on Dayna

Roger Kellaway Trio *New Jazz Standards Vol. 3*

SUMMIT 716

★★★½

Pianist Roger Kellaway's playing is technically perfect and pleurably melodic, with playful prestidigitation. His protean personality cheerily adapts to rag, stride, swing, new-age, avant-garde. Jazz is the acme of Kellaway's avatars: Potent improvs, composing and arranging skills have enriched sessions with Duke Ellington, Sonny Rollins, Carmen McRae, Ben Webster and Clark Terry. His *Cello Quartet* (1979) sets a high bar for chamber jazz, and his transcendent duos with clarinetist Eddie Daniels enchant to this day.

On *New Jazz Standards Vol. 3*, Kellaway—alongside bassist Jay Leonhart and drummer Peter Erskine—showcases tunes by Carl Saunders, veteran lead trumpeter in Bill Holman's edgy, cool juggernaut big band. The prolific Saunders has written his own fakebook of 400 pieces he'd like enshrined as "new jazz classics."

The material? Frankly, ordinary. Its interpretation? Flawlessly inventive. Listeners hear this top-flight trio play the heck out of a baker's dozen anodyne bop-era ditties. It's like commissioning Frank Gehry to build your garage or asking Maurizio Pollini to wax Carl Czerny

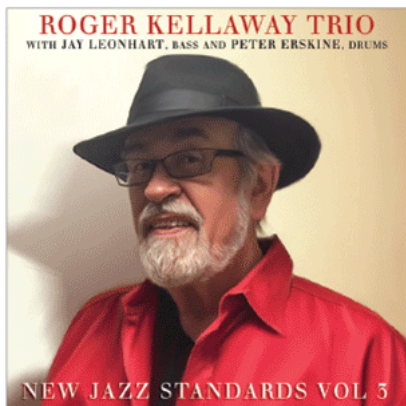
Stephens, Nicholas Payton, John Raymond and Corey Fonville, to help fully realize the music.

Phoenix is an album that defies any hint of conformity as "River Song" begins with experimental sound design, before revealing remnants of a jazz aesthetic. Listeners might be fooled into believing *Phoenix* is going to tell a story through synthesized ornamentation, but as the album moves forward, Santiago unfurls his jazz chops. The fourth cut on the album, "Gaia's Warning," begins with a quiet, shimmering introduction. It's an opening that doesn't intimate Nir Felder's brilliant guitar playing or Ben Flocks' exciting tenor saxophone solo are on the horizon.

Featuring a handful of notable players and a number of thematic overtures that take the listener on a strange sonic journey, *Phoenix* is a work that puts Santiago's intelligence, vision and ability to tell a mythical musical tale on full display. But the album, as personal as it is, lacks the ability to connect with a casual listener who might not have tremendous insight into the bandleader's thoughts, emotions and familial history. —Jordannah Elizabeth

Phoenix: River Song; Autumn; Phoenix; Gaia's Warning; Tomorrow; Abyss (Light); Autumn (Reprise); Alive. (46:11)
Personnel: Javier Santiago, piano; Fender Rhodes, synthesizers, trumpet, vocals; Corey Fonville, drums; Zach Brown, bass (4, 6), electric bass (2, 3, 7); Nir Felder, electric guitar (3, 4, 5, 6); Dayna Stephens, tenor saxophone (4); EWI (3, 6); Ben Flocks, tenor saxophone (1, 3, 4), soprano saxophone (1, 2, 7); John Raymond, flugelhorn (5); Nicholas Payton (8); Omar Abdulkarim (4), trumpet; J. Hoard (1), Proper-T (1, 2, 7), vocals; Adrian Suarez, percussion (6).

Ordering info: ropeadope.com



études. The pros spin it out with wit and dash: clean, crisp, takes of so-so stuff. Leonhart camps, sings, bows. Erskine brushes, shuffles, trades eights. And the bandleader sprinkles magic dust over all, sparks ballads with scintillating embellishments—even Bill Evans-y two-track counterpoint—shifts gears and feints with joy and lightness, and the date goes swimmingly. California classic. —Fred Bouchard

New Jazz Standards Vol. 3: Prudence; Dees Blues; Calming Notion; Noodlin'; Short & Sweet; Walking On Air; Is That Asking Too Much; Valtzing; Sweetness; Hurry Up & Wait; A Verse; Minor Infraction; Forever Again. (74:58)

Personnel: Roger Kellaway, piano; Jay Leonhart, bass; Peter Erskine, drums; Buster Williams, bass (15); Sarto Savino, drums (15).

Ordering info: summitrecords.com



Jeff Denson *Outside My Window*

RIDGEWAY 009

★★★½

Outside My Window, the 12th studio release by bassist Jeff Denson, is an innovative hybrid, featuring four tribute songs alongside four original compositions that combine steadfast straight-ahead jazz concepts with a taste of the new and experimental.

Accompanied by saxophonist Danya Stephens, percussionist Ronen Itzik and keyboardist Kari Ikonen, the bandleader's vocal work is the focal point of the album, as Denson sings with a frequency he hasn't put on wax before. The opening track, "Grace," sets the tone with intricate synths bumping up against double bass, underscored by Stephens' rich alto. Of all the tunes on *Outside My Window*, the opener does the best job of transitioning seamlessly from analog to digital sounds, foregrounding the theme of new versus old.

The compositions, arranged by Denson, are of great quality, but their cohesion across eight tracks is tough to recognize, leaving the listener wanting something to bridge the gap.

Most of the bassist's originals highlight the album's accompanying artists. Moments like the two-minute improvised bridge on "Fell On Black Days" embodies the spirit of the genre. Here, Denson's ability as a bassist is confirmed, yet again. However, the improvisation gets a bit left-of-center during the hyper-experimental moments, as on the clunky "Have We Really Gone This Far?" The placement of the offbeat composition interrupts the flow of the album, as it falls dead-center at track four.

The project as a whole is a reinvention, and a successful expression of who Jeff Denson is today, while still offering a glimpse of what might be ahead. —Alma Hill

Outside My Window: Grace; In Your Eyes; For A Brand New Day; Have We Really Gone This Far?; Through The Mist; Bird Alone; Fell On Black Days; Outside My Window. (50:02)

Personnel: Jeff Denson, bass, vocals; Dayna Stephens, tenor, soprano, baritone saxophone, EWI; Kari Ikonen, piano, Fender Rhodes; Moog; Ronen Itzik, drums.

Ordering info: ridgewayrecords.com