

Johnny Griffin - The Congregation (2006)

Written by bluesever

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1. *The Congregation* 6:45
2. *Latin Quarter* 6:27
3. *I'm Glad There Is You* 5:08
4. *Main Spring* 6:31
5. *It's You Or No One* 4:49
6. *I Remember You* 7:29

Personnel:

Johnny Griffin (tenor saxophone);

Sonny Clark (piano);

Paul Chambers (bass);

Kenny Dennis (drums).

The great tenor saxophonist Johnny Griffin is heard in top form on this near-classic quartet set. Assisted by pianist Sonny Clark, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummer Kenny Dennis, Griffin is exuberant on "The Congregation" (which is reminiscent of Horace Silver's "The Preacher"), thoughtful on the ballads, and swinging throughout. It's recommended for bop collectors.

---Scott Yanow, Rovi

A highly regarded recording in the impressive discography of Johnny Griffin, this recently remastered RVG edition of *The Congregation* is more likely to appeal to the faithful than win many new converts. On this 1957 session, the "world's fastest tenor sets aside his gun-slinging

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ways in favor of comparatively restrained, straightforward preaching, consisting of some basic, rather predictable harmonic-rhythmic rhetoric and, of course, that distinctive sound.

Griffin's ample and slow Leslie-like vibrato is somewhat reminiscent of Dexter Gordon's but without the long tall one's frequently sardonic send-up of swing-era clichés, replacing them with tension-filled, dramatic alternatives derived from a chord's extended harmonies. In brief, the program on *The Congregation* is curiously unengaging: it would almost seem the "Little Giant" dispatched more souls with his six-shooters than his sermonizing.

A sense of over-familiarity sets in immediately with the introductory title song, a thinly disguised variation on Horace Silver's "The Preacher. The remaining five tunes, including the ballad "I'm Glad There Is You, all gravitate toward the same groove—a medium-up tempo in the key of concert F (a recurrent top tone in the tenor solos as well). And as solid, even sparkling, as they are, Paul Chambers' bass solos on each of the tunes—at least three of them bowed—tend to underscore the repetitive, formulaic nature of the proceedings.

The virtuosity and rapid-fire articulations of the gifted tenor man begin to emerge on John Jenkins' "Latin Quarter (somewhat of a misnomer) with a couple of heated, double-timed choruses and an arresting cadenza, but the momentary spark is extinguished until Jule Styne's always welcome "It's You Or No One which, though again in F, is at least taken at a slightly brighter tempo.

Pianist Sonny Clark and Chambers are a flawless team as usual, and the somewhat unusual employment of drummer Kenny Dennis does nothing to obstruct their customary flow. The bonus track, "I Remember You (in F, naturally), is another nice standard but does little for the program. Its inclusion, in fact, begs comparison with Cannonball Adderley's superb Cannonball Takes Charge (Riverside, 1959), a session that employs the same instrumentation and a similar program yet maintains a hard, gemlike flame throughout. ---Samuel Chell, Rovi

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