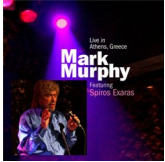


Mark Murphy - Live In Athens, Greece (2016)

Written by bluesever

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01. *My Funny Valentine* (9:43) 02. *All Blues* (8:16) 03. *On Green Dolphin Street* (6:32) 04. *Summertime* (4:41) 05. *Autumn Leaves* (2:53) 06. *When I Fall In Love* (8:22) 07. *Bye Bye Blackbird* (7:08) 08. *Miles* (2:57) 09. *Milestones* (8:02) 10. *Red Clay* (7:57) 11. *Inutil Paisagem* (6:40) Mark Murphy - vocals Alex Drakos Ktistakis - Drums Spiros Exaras - Guitar (Electric) George Georgiadis - Bass (Acoustic) Costa Kostopoulos - Mixing Phil Magnotti - Mastering Thomas Rueckert – Piano

Why do we need another Mark Murphy album? After all, well over 40 were released in his own lifetime, not counting all the compilations, collaborations, guest appearances and remixes. This live set was recorded at the Gazarte Club, Athens, in 2008, not long after Murphy's 76th birthday. It features Spiros Exaras (guitar), Thomas Rueckert (piano), George Georgiadis (double bass) and Alex Drakos (drums).

The tune selection veers toward the hackneyed (the 'bog standards', as one London gig booker recently designated them): *Summertime*, *Autumn Leaves*, *Bye Bye Blackbird*. Surely, one might think, we don't need yet more versions of these.

And yet, and yet.... Mark Murphy shows any doubting Thomases what he has been showing anyone prepared to listen over the decades: not only can the sheer power of a standard survive its (over)familiarity, but with the right performer, unsuspected beauties may still be revealed.

Acknowledging the genii loci of Homer and Socrates, Murphy slips straight into *My Funny Valentine*. It's a spine-chilling performance. Almost everything you need to know about Mark Murphy can be found in this opening track: the vocal swoops, falsetto lines, scattling, swinging

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and riffing, plus some good jokes: 'Is your figure less than Greek? Excuse me, that's the lyric...' and 'Don't change your hairdo for me', and 'Your looks are laughable', sung with an affectionate chuckle. It's all very hip and fun – Murphy's pleasure in performing never seemed to dim.

The band are excellent. Going into double-time on a ballad may seem just another cliché, but on this tune it perfectly fits with the mood established by the singer, and Exaras and Rueckert pull out some dazzling runs. Murphy ends with a held falsetto note that extends into the intro of the next number, All Blues. Here he improvises both wordlessly and on the lyric. Afterwards it's straight into the verse of On Green Dolphin Street, sung rubato and unaccompanied right through the first head, followed by another unaccompanied chorus in which he goes into time, scatting again and fracturing the tune and its lyric, before the band finally come in behind him.

There are no duff tracks. I particularly love the storming performance of On the Red Clay, and the inclusion of Murphy's never-forgotten formative influences – Nat King Cole (When I Fall In Love), Miles Davis (both his own composition, the ballad Miles, and his famous version of Milestones, with his own lyric) and Jobim (a medley of Inútil Paisagem and Dindi).

Harbinger Records are currently trying to organise distribution in Europe. In the meantime this wonderful album can be obtained from the US or through the usual digital channels.

Considering the vast recorded output of Mark Murphy, and the thousands of gigs he performed around the world over a 60-year career, Live in Athens must surely be the tip of the iceberg. What other treasures still lie in the vaults? --- Peter Jones, londonjazznews.com

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