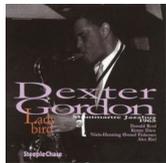


Dexter Gordon Quintet - Ladybird (1965)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 16 October 2009 13:42 - Last Updated Saturday, 06 September 2014 14:51

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1. *Ladybird* Dameron 2:03 2. *So What* Davis 12:37 3. *Who Can I Turn To (When Nobody Needs Me)* Bricusse, Newley 1:21 4. *Blues by Five* Davis 4:12 Personnel: Dexter Gordon, tenor saxophone Donald Byrd, trumpet Kenny Drew, piano Niels Pedersen, bass Alex Riel, drums

The latest offering from the seemingly bottomless Danmarks Radio Archive, this disc presents another air shot of Gordon's lengthy mid-1960s Café Montmartre stint. Dex's sizable cachet as an expatriate jazz icon prompted a nightly spooling of the tape machines. The resulting cache, so far doled out one set at a time, documents a particularly fertile time for the saxophonist. Shortly after arriving on European shores he teamed with pianist Kenny Drew and a topflight pair of locals in the persons of Pedersen and Riel, set up shop and enjoyed a more relaxed lifestyle than the scuffling of his earlier Big Apple years. This package is a bit different from the previous ones in that it presents trumpeter Donald Byrd, a fellow NYC émigré, sitting in with the working group.

The top-heavy program revolves around extended readings of two standards: the Tad Dameron-penned title track and a blue-chip modal number from the best-selling jazz album of all-time. After a brief ensemble stroll through theme Gordon essays a hungry, if slightly boilerplate solo that swallows up a healthy string of choruses. Byrd follows, cooler in cast and surfing across Riel's frothy snare and cymbal-driven fills with a succession of slightly smeared runs. Pithy Drew and Pedersen statements follow. Riel lends steady hi-hat and sharp, textured brushwork to the latter's deft pizzicato exposition and the two wear their advanced postbop pedigrees proudly. The piece winds up with a short spate of robust exchanges between Riel and the rest. These closing minutes are marred by a recurring and intrusive tape warble that ends up sounding oddly like a third remedial horn.

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“So What” receives a comparably elongated reading with Pedersen paying homage to and capaciously expanding on Paul Chambers’ original epochal role. After the familiar bass invocation and riffing theme Gordon breaks away and spools out a sultry solo flanked briefly by just Pedersen and Riel at a brisk, but effervescent tempo. As on the previous cut, Drew delivers deft complementary chords that push the action without prodding it. Byrd’s improvisation unfolds in the leader’s wake, displaying a bit of the gelid clarity that was the composer’s calling card. Pedersen brings up the rear with another compact colloquium on killer contrabass technique. The horns wisely abstain from reentry and let it stand as the dénouement.

Byrd sits out on a luxurious “Who Can I Turn To?”, but the band returns to full-size for the closer, another Miles Davis’ tune, “Blues By Five.” The trumpeter’s presence and the high degree of rapport shared by the rhythm section make this date one of note. Coupled with a tune choice that strays dexterously in more challenging directions than the band’s usual diet of bop standards it’s a welcome program that finds Gordon in a limber and exploratory mode. Foibles in fidelity aside, Dex aficionados will be sold on the disc’s face value. But casual listeners will probably also be pleasingly surprised by the caliber of this classic conclave.

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