Harold Mabern - Mabern Plays Mabern (2020)



1 Mr. Johnson 2 The Iron Man 3 Lover Man 4 The Lyrical Cole-Man 5 Edward Lee 6 It's Magic 7 The Beehive 8 Rakin' and Scrapin' Harold Mabern: piano Eric Alexander: saxophone, tenor John Webber: bass, acoustic Joe Farnsworth: drums Steve Davis: trombone Vincent Herring: saxophone

A tad more subdued than the barn-burning The Iron Man: Live At Smoke (Smoke Sessions Records, 2019), Mabern Plays Mabern still manages to jump full throttle from where that defining recording left us, with a lush, lyrical intensity and a vital, legacy-culling energy which plays as an exquisite coda to the pianist's long, outstanding career.

Alive with the same stylist's intuition and unbridled spirit which found him cutting through the ranks with such contemporaries as Charles Lloyd and Steve Coleman, and had him sitting on many notable sessions with, among others, Lee Morgan, Freddie Hubbard, Archie Shepp and Sarah Vaughan, the 81-year-old gentleman bopper takes to the spotlight and the stage, and celebrates our common humanity joyously with a virile drive that will surely stun young lions half his age.

Riding rubato into his rollicking tribute to J.J. Johnson, stalwart saxophonist Eric Alexander launches into the first of many flights of high-stakes frenzy as Mabern comps raucously behind him, buoyed by long-standing bassist John Webber and drummer Joe Farnsworth on high heat. The guest addition of trombonistSteve Davis gives the performance added zest, to the great delight of the Smoke audience.

Mabern and Alexander trade blows (and Farnsworth solos for all he is worth) on "The Lyrical

Cole-Man" a fevered nod to Coleman, whom he remained close friends with till the end. 1968's "Rakin' and Scrapin" makes its second, though lengthier rock solid appearance in as many recordings. Mabern's big hands swing a lot like, well, the Mabern of '68. Webber and Farnsworth hold steady with a soulful groove as Alexander sails and wails along. "The Beehive" buzzes as Alexander and special guestVincent Herring's winding alto sax leap and bound, play tag, and fuel each other's performance. A fitting farewell, indeed. ---Mark Jurkovic, allaboutjazz.com

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