

Modern Jazz Quartet – Concorde (1955)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Ralph's new blues* 2. *All of you* 3. *Ill remember april* 4. *Gershwin potpourri* 5. *Softly as in a morning sunrise* 6. *Concorde* Percy Heath - bass Connie Kay - drums Milt Jackson - vibraphone John Lewis - piano

After issuing 10" EPs for several years, *Concorde* (1955) marked two significant touchstones in the five-plus-decade career of the Modern Jazz Quartet (MJQ). One of those was the replacement of co-founder Kenny Clarke (drums) with former Lester Young quintet member Connie Kay (drums), who joined in time for the other hallmark -- this, the MJQ's very first full-length long-player. Kay remained with the combo for the better part of four decades, until his passing in 1994. The transition between percussionists is both smooth as well as sensible. Kay's understated rhythms and solid timekeeping are perfectly suited to the clever arrangements and sophisticated sound of Milt Jackson (vibraphone), John Lewis (piano) and Percy Heath (bass). One MJQ constant is the blend of classic covers and stunning original compositions that comprise their releases. *Concorde* is certainly no exception as the effort kicks off with a mid-tempo Jackson's "Ralph's New Blues." Immediately, Kay's contributions are ample yet discrete, as he interacts with a consistent backbeat, supporting the tasty vibe runs and improvisations from the tune's author. The title track "Concorde" is the other tune to be derived from within the band. Lewis' effervescent syncopation drives through the heart of the melody, with the pianist laying down essential interplay. Once again Kay impresses with well-placed ringing interjections that never overpower the soloist. Most notable among the reworked popular standards are the slightly brooding opulence of Cole Porter's "All of You" and the fugal, if not slightly Third Stream approach taken on "Softly, As in a Morning Sunrise" from the short-lived collaborations of Sigmund Romberg and Oscar Hammerstein II. However, the centerpiece is undoubtedly the four selections within the "Gershwin Medley." The interpretations of "Soon," "For You, For Me Forevermore," "Love Walked In" and "Our Love Is Here to Stay" are nothing short of definitive. They collectively provide keen insight into the inner-workings of the MJQ and their collective abilities to improvise with purpose, rather than simply combining aimless solos. All manner of post-bop jazz listeners will find much to enjoy throughout *Concorde*. ---Lindsay Planer, Rovi

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