

Steffen Kuehn Nonet - Now Or Later (2002)

Written by bluesever

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1. Now or Later 2. Juno's Eyes 3. Freedomland 4. Not in Austria 5. Rest Revised 6. So Far Away 7. Oleo 8. Forced FN 9. Ruby, My Dear 10. Try to C# Steffen Kuehn, trumpet, flugelhorn; Dave Scott, Terry Russell, trumpet; Alex Budman, alto, soprano sax, bass clarinet, flute; Alex Murzyn, tenor sax, clarinet, flute; Pete Cornell, baritone, soprano sax, flute; Jonathan Alford, piano; Mike Bacile, bass; Andrew Eberhard, drums; + Tim Hagans, trumpet.

As I was listening to trumpeter Steffen Kuehn's new album, *Now or Later*, two thoughts occurred: (1) these guys can really play, and (2) why am I not enjoying it more?

I think the answer to that second thought rests not so much on how Kuehn and his colleagues play as it does on what they are playing. This is what is known as post bop or contemporary, and while in this instance it is rhythmically strong, it is also—to define the issue as clearly as possible—melodically less than persuasive. Call me old-fashioned (others have) but there are no songs here (excepting Sonny Rollins' "Oleo and Monk's "Ruby, My Dear) to beckon the ear or quicken the heart. Six of the compositions and all of the arrangements are by someone identified as W Roth, and none save perhaps the bright-eyed finale, "Try to C#, is, to me, of more than passing interest.

Having said that, the fact is that Kuehn, his sidemen and guest trumpeter Tim Hagans are high-caliber players who make the most of whatever is on their plate. The ensemble is shipshape, the rhythm section strong and supportive, and the solos, while hardly groundbreaking, are never less than effective (Kuehn is especially convincing on "Ruby, My Dear, while baritone Pete Cornell burns intensely on "C#). Tenor saxophonist Alex Murzyn is featured on "Not in Austria, pianist Jonathan Alford on "So Far Away. Hagans frames a number of conclusive statements, most notably on "Oleo, "C#, and Russell Ferrante's "Freedomland.

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The talent on offer speaks for itself, and other listeners may not have the problem I had with lyricism, or the lack thereof. A trim and assertive post bop session for those less hidebound than I. ---Jack Bowers, allaboutjazz.com

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