Wynton Marsalis – The Midnight Blues - Standard Time, Vol. 5 (1998)



1 Party's Over (6:02) 2 You're Blasé (6:36) 3 After You've Gone (5:43) 4 Glad To Be Unhappy (7:44) 5 It Never Entered My Mind (6:04) 6 Baby Won't You Please Come Home (5:25) 7 Guess I'll Hang My Tears Out To Dry (5:55) 8 I Got Lost In Her Arms (5:03) 9 Ballad Of The Sad Young Men (5:47) 10 Spring Will Be A Little Late This Year (4:27) 11 My Man's Gone Now (4:32) 12 Midnight Blues (11:53) Personnel: Wynton Marsalis (trumpet); Robert Freedman (conductor); Paul Peabody, Israel Chorberg, Krista Feeney, Richard Henrickson, Jean Ingraham, Ann Leathers, Nancy McAlhany, Ron Oakland, Susan Ornstein, Sandra Park, John Pintavalle, Matt Raidmondi, Laura J. Seaton, Lisa Steinberg (violin); Lamar Alsop, Julien Barber, Carol Landon, Sue Pray, Maxine Roach (viola); Richard Locker, Eric Friedlander, Eugene Moy (cello); Eric Reed (piano); Reginald Veal, John Beal, Lawrence Glazener, Paul Harris (bass); Lewis Nash (drums).

With pianist Eric Reed, bassist Reginald Veal, drummer Lewis Nash and a 42-piece string orchestra, trumpeter Wynton Marsalis has released a session of romantic standards, continuing the set of Standard Time volumes released earlier in his career. Bringing his trumpet's unique voice to the microphone, Marsalis combines his pure tone, squeezed notes, and a soulful vibrato with the sounds from strings and piano trio. The tunes are romantic standards with heartfelt lyrics; however, the expected emotional content is somewhat limited by the trumpeter's playfulness and tendency to hold back on long legato phrases. At times blase' and at other times more enthusiastic, the trumpeter's lyrical lead lines move in and out of romance.

With muted trumpet on an extraordinarily slow version of "Baby, Won't You Please Come Home" Marsalis delivers the blues in wah-wah fashion with full support from all. It's the session's highlight, with warm, wet kisses being figuratively thrown about the room. The trumpeter changes textures several times, from mutes to wide open, and each time his message becomes more clear: "Baby, you come home to me now, `cause here's my heart on a platter, and it's all yours if you'll just come on home!"

Elsewhere, trumpetary playfulness and excessive flutters get in the way of romance. On "After You've Gone" and "I Guess I'll Hang My Tears Out to Dry" the lyric message seems wasted in trumpet tricks, minor growls, and buzz tones. Those very same features, however, return to fill "I Got Lost in Her Arms" with the excitement of a proud, lock-step pair of Tango dancers all dressed up for the occasion and in fine form. Marsalis cries through his horn on "My Man's Gone Now" with the application of flutter-tongued rolls, valve dips, and gentle squeezes. "The Midnight Blues," a somber Marsalis ballad, presents alternating moods of the nighttime: fear and anger contrast with soothing lullabies through ever-changing musical elements. Matching timbres with melody, harmony, and rhythm, the composer has created a piece that paints a night gallery of images real and imaginary.

Although the trumpeter's tone, technique, and intonation are above reproach, he's been criticized in the past for a lack of "soul," a lack of "fire," and the absence of unique identifying stylistic traits. Marsalis and Reed begin "Glad to be Unhappy" with added expression and a sensitive approach similar to that of trumpeter Ruby Braff, but the trumpeter quickly turns it over to playful asides that erode the expected picture. And yet these very attributes represent the unique character of the trumpeter, expressive and playful. There's something to love in almost everything Marsalis writes, but some areas lie in wait of future refinements. ---Jim Santella, allaboutjazz.com

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