

Joe Castro - Mood Jazz (1957)

Written by bluesever

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01. J.C. Blues 02. Without You 03. Doodlin' 04. Everything I Love 05. You Stepped Out Of A Dream 06. If You Could See Me Now 07. It's You Or No One 08. Angel Eyes 09. Caravan
Joe Castro (piano) Ed Shonk (bass) John Hannan (trumpet) Glenn Prescott (alto saxophone)
Philly Joe Jones (drums) Gus Johnson (drums) unidentified strings unknown (chorus) Neal Hefti (arranger, conductor) Track 05: NYC, November 19, 1956 Tracks 02, 06, 08, 09: NYC, January 30, 1957 Tracks 01, 03, 04, 07: NYC, February 2, 1957

Joe Castro is certainly one of the most obscure jazz pianists who primarily cruised the nightclub and lounge scene of the late '50s. From his native Miami, AZ, to Pittsburg, CA, with stopovers in San Jose, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York City, Castro toiled in relative obscurity, though championed by no less a jazz great than Dave Brubeck. A recording that was originally released on vinyl by Atlantic Records, the entire album is reissued on this CD. It's a curious collection of standards accompanied by strings and voices, and what makes it unique is the usage of saccharine accompanists. In most instances, the trio plays the melody and the strings or voices are tacked on to the end of phases, not as an integral part of the overall arrangements. It is as if they are there as a tease, or even a mild condiment, rather than an element that complements the music. It could easily be proffered that the music with just the trio would be better off without the others. Nonetheless, it is what it is, whether doling out a basic sound on "J.C. Blues," a well-sung "It's You or No One," or "Everything I Love," all at a standardized midtempo clip replete with wordless vocal doodle-de-oohs, doo-doo-doo, and oohs and ahhs, respectively. At a low point is an imprecise -- nay incorrect -- take of Horace Silver's "Doodlin'." Neal Hefti contributed the marginal arrangements on the traditional tune "Without You," which work the best for the ballad "If You Could See Me Now" and the calypso version of "Caravan," where the strings are a pleasant afterthought. Ray Ellis approaches the strings differently with the vocalists on "You Stepped Out of a Dream," while the drumming of Philly Joe Jones steps up the energy. "Angel Eyes" is the best of the lot, as the tempos shift back and forth and hold interest. Castro himself is quite competent, pleasant, and even interesting, paralleling Brubeck, Bill Evans, and George Shearing. By 1960 Castro's jazz recording career was over, as he devoted his craft to commercial work for films and backing singers in Las Vegas. It is a shame that his talent, submerged for the most part on this date,

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was never showcased in a fonder light. ---Michael G. Nastos, AllMusic Review

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