Kenny Garrett - Happy People (2002)



1. Song For DiFang (5:26)
2. Happy People (5:12)
3. Tango In 6 (5:52)
4. Ain't Nothing But The Blues (5:11)
5. Song #8 (3:43)
6. Halima's Story (5:32)
7. Monk-ing Around (4:43)
8. A Hole In One (5:59)
9. Thessalonika (4:50)
10. Asian Medley (7:03)
11. Brother B. Harper (7:59)

Musicians: Kenny Garrett - soprano saxophone
Vernell Jr. Brown - piano
Marcus Miller - bass guitar
Charnett Moffett - acoustic bass
Michael 'Patches' Stewart - flugelhorn (2)
Bobby Hutcherson - vibraphone
Chris Daddy Dave - drums
Jean Norris – vocals

As of 2002, Kenny Garrett had spent a decade recording for Warner Bros., with Happy People being his seventh release for the major label. That was a remarkable accomplishment in an era when, to succeed, it seemed that jazz musicians either had to adopt pop-oriented contemporary jazz as their style or, if they stayed in a traditional mode, be, uh, dead. Garrett remained very much alive, but Happy People demonstrated the strategies that the alto saxophonist had developed to maintain his precarious status. Basically, he took a little from both of those successful approaches. As on his previous album, Simply Said, he employed Marcus Miller on a

selective basis as an electric bassist, also promoting Miller to co-producer. Miller, who knew his way around contemporary jazz, helped turn the opening track, "Song for DiFang," into the kind of number that potentially could be played on smooth jazz radio stations. And those stations probably also would feel at home with the title track, slotted second in the album's sequence, which featured vocals by Jean Norris. Indeed, if you stopped listening there, you'd classify Happy People as a contemporary jazz album. But Garrett turned gradually more traditional as the album went on, and he also supplied signposts to his illustrious (and dead) predecessors, humorously imitating former employer Miles Davis' harsh whisper of a voice at the start of "Ain't Nothing but the Blues," dedicating "Monk-ing Around" to Thelonious Monk, and, in the closing track, "Brother B. Harper," which nominally concerned saxophonist Billy Harper, actually sounding much more like John Coltrane. What kept Happy People from being a compromised effort was Garrett's always-impressive playing, but it was certainly a record that carefully touched a lot of bases. ---William Ruhlmann, All Music Guide

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