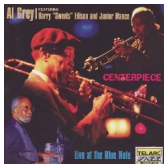


Al Grey - Centerpiece. Live At The Blue Note (1995)

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1. *Diz Related* 2. *South Side* 3. *I Wish I Knew* 4. *Homage to Norman* 5. *Nascimento* 6. *S.W.B. Blues* 7. *Lester Leaps In* 8. *Bewitched* 9. *Centerpiece* Al Grey - trombone Jerome Richardson - tenorsaxophone, flute Harry Sweets Edison - trumpet Junior Mance - piano Ben Brown - bass Bobby Durham – drums Recorded live at the Blue Note, New York

Basie-style blues and swing are the foundation of this amiable live set from 1995. This is no surprise, given Al Grey's and Harry "Sweets" Edison's work with the Count -- Grey most notably from 1957-1961 and Edison from 1938-1950. From that base, though, the two take divergent paths here. Renowned though he is for his brassy bravado and skill with the plunger mute, Grey seems too firmly planted in an earlier era, so much so that his playing can come across as nostalgic routines. It is actually elder statesman Edison (at 79, Grey's senior by almost a decade), who -- still working within the swing ethic -- creates some fresh sparks. His warm and slippery tone, technical finesse, and improvisational skills yield a choice handful of timeless statements. Rounding out the front line, Jerome Richardson plays well but his tenor saxophone sounds thin in the mix (Richardson is the only one who gets this treatment; otherwise the sound is quite good). In the rhythm section, pianist Junior Mance, working from a more boppish perspective, injects some drive and harmonic spice into the performances. Bassist Ben Brown and drummer Bobby Durham slug away in classic style and also get in a couple of credible solos each. Most of the music follows a predictable course, with some noteworthy exceptions. These include an energetic romp on "Lester Leaps In"; Barry Harris' "Nascimento," a bossa nova with a welcome flute solo from Richardson; and Edison's title track, a song popularized in versions by Lambert, Hendricks & Ross and, later, by Joni Mitchell. ---Jim Todd, Rovi

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