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Jon Weber is a virtuoso, pure and simple. Weber delivers what amounts to a five star effort if only for his all-original program, incisive in its compositional aesthetic.

Just to set the record straight, we are *not* talking about the more well known bassist, John Webber. And we are talking about a 42-year-old with many more prime years ahead of him. He is *certainly not* 57, as the All Music Guide reports. Weber has dedicated much of his 30-year career to being a self-sufficient one-man band. How so? Weber studied and became a master of stride and other early piano styles closely related to jazz such as ragtime. He is called on annually to take these skills on the road from Western Europe to Scandinavia to Australia.

A walking/talking musical encyclopedia with perfect pitch and recall, Weber can spit out minute details of tens of thousands of tunes he has internalized since his childhood years learning piano rolls, which his grandmother had amassed. By his teens Weber had opened for jazz luminaries such as Pat Metheny, Buddy Rich, Freddie Hubbard, Angela Bofill, and Stanley Turrentine. On a cell phone call I recently had with Weber, he demonstrated this extraordinary ability. When I told him that I am from Chevy Chase, MD, he immediately retorted "Chevy Chase," and proceeded to play an eponymous composition by composer Eubie Blake, whom Weber knew was from this region—Baltimore to be exact. He even spat out the year that it was written and what for.

On *Simple Complex*, Weber has amassed a stellar line-up of international headliners of today's jazz scene. These include fellow Chicagoan Kurt Elling, Mark Walker on drums and Diego Urcola on trumpet (both of Paquito D'Rivera's working bands), tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander, Roy Hargrove on flügelhorn, session oboist Paul McCandless, Gary Burton on vibes for several tracks and bassists Avishai Cohen and the world's most famous Danish bassist, Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen. Also be sure to be on the lookout for young Australian Matt Clohesy, whom Weber discovered while on tour "Down Under."

Alexander's burnished tenor combined with Urcola's raw Latin-bop flair add a powerful confidence and depth to blowing tunes like "Hot Ice," "Drastic Steps," and the final cut, "Triska Deka." Alexander masterfully builds his solo so well on "Drastic Steps" that he had me skipping back over the same part again and again to hear how he moved into such a great double-time figure while staying in-sync with the rhythm section. Equally notable is Walker's layered polyrhythmic figures on the title tune.

Weber's up-tempo solo flights show his dedication to razor-sharp chops. At the same time his slower lush harmonic ballads are equally stirring. Check the "one take wonder," Roy Hargrove, as he and Weber duo on "No More Words." Also check out Walker's sauntering bongos on "Mister Kleckley," against a funky horn line and Kurt Elling's hip scatted unison accompaniment to the horn melody on "Is it Only Me?" This disc will take any listener on an unexpected mystical journey with unexpected turns at every corner. Weber's effort is unequaled on several levels by many more well-known artists on major labels. And there is enough diversity of material on this CD to satisfy almost any taste. Bottom line: Jon Weber deserves your attention. Watch out for him in the next few years.

Matthew Merewitz