

# - FINLAND -



**FEBRUARY 24, 2005**

**JON WEBER -**

## *Simple Complex*

One almost becomes delirious upon discovering a great record from an extraordinary undiscovered artist. Jon Weber has visited Helsinki, because he has been over the years a steady artist at Jazzkaar Festival in Tallinn, playing mostly with our friend Toivo Unt. It is worthwhile to check him out next time he is here.

43-year old Weber started to play piano as a wunderkind soon after learning walking learning how to play more than 2000 tunes from his father's records. Later, after gigging at Chicago's best restaurants and lounges, he enthusiastically delved into jams with classic jazz musicians and Von Freeman's entourage. In 1993, he released his first CD.

This record consists entirely of Jon's original compositions, and he assembles a large group of modern jazz giants. Conceptually, this record is rooted in mainstream modern jazz, and the only thing missing is unbridled free jazz. Weber reminds me of Kip Kanrahan, because every other tune includes ethnic influences from different parts of the world. He is very skilled at knowing how to fit guest players into the music seamlessly. Argentinian Diego Urcola sounds "most American" with his "Kind of Blue"-style playing, but also Roy Hargrove plays a very beautiful duo with the host. Oboist Paul McCandless is charged by Oregon/Middle-Eastern influences, and Indian tabla player Kalyan Pathak, accompanies singers Kurt Elling and Alicia Renee. Rubén Alvarez admirably represents Cuba playing his timbales solo. These players perform/solo on one tune each.

Gary Burton sets the feeling on the sextet tunes, his vibraphone treated with qualitatively smaller reverb and vibrato than the 60s productions - resulting in a Mike Mainieri, "Steps Ahead" fusion-jazz sound. Tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander, the much-sought-after sessionist, is, also well-known in Finland. He generates tremendous feeling with his playing, on which he sounds like a young Michael Brecker; Diego Urcola's playing is reminiscent of Randy Brecker's.

Jon Weber, as a pianist, is extremely skillful, stylistically somewhere in between Herbie Hancock and Keith Jarrett. Modestly, he plays on his own record, relatively brief and concise solos. Most of his compositions and arrangements are pleasant and quite catchy, and the groundwork of the entire record is truly groovy. Drummer Mark Walker is a strong player, as are VIP guest bassists Avishai Cohen, Peter Washington and N-HØP.

It is a great record on which a cool group of marquee modern jazz soloists perform real quality mainstream music. Information on the record cover is good, but I did not find product number, so you have to visit his website, which is extraordinary.

**- Olli Ervasti -**

