

The Kansas City Jazz Orchestra Rhapsody

Personnel: Clint Ashlock, artistic director, conductor and trumpeter; Joe Cartwright, piano (tracks 2 and 8); Kathleen Holeman (track 6) and Ron Gutierrez (track 4), vocals; David Chael, alto and soprano sax and flute; Bob Long, alto sax and flute; Doug Talley and Brad Gregory, tenor sax, clarinet and flute; Mark Cohick, baritone sax, bass clarinet, flute, oboe and clarinet; Steve Molloy, Bob Harvey, Jay Sollenberger and David Aaberg, trumpet; Jeff Hamer, Earlie Braggs, Steve Dekker and Paul Roberts (bass), trombone; Charles Williams, piano; Rod Fleeman, guitar; James Albright, bass; John Kizilarmut, drums; Sam Wisman, percussion; Coleen Dieker and Adam Galblum, violin (tracks 1 and 2); Marvin Gruenbaum, viola (tracks 1 and 2); Ezgi Karakus, cello (tracks 1 and 2); Elena Talley, clarinet (tracks 1 and 2); Matthew Haislip, French horn (tracks 1 and 2); Brett Jackson, tenor sax (track 2); Ryan Heinlein, trombone (tracks 2, 3, 5, 7 and 8); Roger Wilder, piano (tracks 4 and 7)

Tracks: Prelude #2 (Blue Lullaby), Rhapsody In Blue, Swinging on a Star, Alfie, Emily, Embraceable You, Every Time We Say Goodbye, I Got Rhythm

Recorded, Mixed and Mastered by Aaron Connor at Cypher Sound Studio, Kansas City, Missouri

I cannot be the only person in the city who has dreamed of a special performance featuring Joe Cartwright with a larger ensemble, playing music written especially for the occasion. A Concerto for Joe. In *Rhapsody In Blue* on this new KCJO recording, that dream has become a magnificent reality.

Clint Ashlock has developed a unique new arrangement of the Gershwin classic, injecting it with Kansas City musical seasoning: blues, swing, some shuffle and mambo rhythms. Cartwright soars throughout the arrangement, in the unaccompanied sections and the ensembles. It's like a history of piano styles, from



classical to stride to swing, Latin, and bop. And it's not just Joe who shines. Doug Talley nails the clarinet opening. The string quartet is perfect. Ashlock solos in a swinging big band section. There is color from the vibes, a great solo from Rod Fleeman, and the band has some melodic support for him and Cartwright who follows; modern big band writing at its best. There is an exchange between Brad Gregory and David Chael that could go on all night. The orchestration of the second melody has beautiful voicings, with the strings and French horn. And then when Joe comes out of a solo section introducing the mambo rhythm (and Steve Dekker's trombone solo), well, I am almost sorry for spoiling the surprise. And then the "Killer Joe" section, it's all like the grand finale at the fireworks show.

There's more Gershwin for Joe, too. He's featured on a swinging *I Got Rhythm* (another Ashlock arrangement) along with Brad Gregory and David Aaberg. The band swings hard on this. Check out the sax section solo! And drummer John Kizilarmut is fantastic (he is throughout the record); watch out for him playing the melody at the close.

The opener *Prelude #2* (more Gershwin!) features the band's regular pianist, Charles Williams, and violinist Coleen Dieker. Bass James Albright is prominent here also. *Embraceable You* is the last Gershwin piece, and features Kathleen Holeman's vocals (great phrasing) on yet another Ashlock chart. Clint takes a flugelhorn solo on the ballad as well.

Everything works on the remaining pieces as well. Ashlock arranged *Alfie* (features Ron Gutierrez and David Chael, and a great intro) and *Everytime We Say Goodbye* (solos by guest Roger Wilder and Mark Cohick). Brad Gregory arranged the beautiful ballad *Emily* for trombonist Jeff Hamer. I was initially thrown when they kicked up the tempo, but it sure satisfies as a swinger, too. And Aaberg contributed his swinging chart of *Swinging on a Star* and it has fine band writing and features the bass trombone of Paul Roberts.

This is a great world-class band, and it seems to me that they have reached the greatest recorded success in *Rhapsody*.

—Roger Atkinson

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NEXT JAM

April is Jazz Appreciation Month. We celebrate it in part with an eloquent remembrance of legendary Kansas City saxophonist Ben Kynard by his son Brett, in the next issue of *Jam*. ||