

while the ensemble's empathetic interplay indicates greater things to come, which is unfortunately only partially true.

The following tune, "Kate Song" drifts into post-Weather Report territory, with guest keyboardist and recent high profile Blue Note signee, Robert Glasper playing some funky Fender Rhodes. But the dated spacy Fusion vibe gets a superfluous upgrade towards the tune's conclusion with overdubbed drum machine programming and swirling, ambient electronics, which sounds entirely gratuitous. The same vibe carries through to "Tail of Benin" which features intensely over-processed guitar (a la Pat Metheny's guitar-synth) from Lage Lund, courting the leader's sinewy soprano. With a few accessible but fairly generic originals executed in an introspective, Post-Bop mode, the balance of the album coasts along enjoyably, though somewhat anonymously, until Smith pares down the group to tackle some standards.

On Charles Mingus' melancholy ballad "Duke Ellington's Sound of Love," Smith delivers a heartfelt tenor solo that sounds wise beyond his years. He also assembles a muscular piano-less quartet for a brisk, stormy run through Ornette Coleman's "Peace." Closing with an invigoratingly stripped-down trio tune, simply titled "Blues," Smith and company prove their mettle as astute improvisers on this hard-swinging, angular original. Ironically, when sticking to conventionally written material and the classic repertoire of a previous generation, Smith excels, but when dabbling in the sounds of his contemporaries he sounds more like a tourist than a peer.

Never judge a book by its cover. Nowhere could this old adage be more appropriate than in regard to the album cover of saxophonist Dan Blake's unfortunately titled debut (3). Combined with song titles like "The Party," "The Sneaky Dance," and "Booze," one is left with less than grand expectations. Although there is a place for "outsider" art and children's drawings, one wouldn't necessarily find that to be on the cover of a record like this. Blake's debut recording is a highly serious, intricate affair, a far cry from the sort of immature music the cover image and song titles suggest.

Blake is no stranger to such exceptional music with a resume that includes time spent on stage and in the studio with numerous Jazz heavyweights, including Herbie Hancock, Christian McBride, Mulgrew Miller, and Danilo Perez.

Blake's writing is joyous, upbeat and ebullient in a way that hasn't been common in the Jazz mainstream since the disbanding of the Microscopic Septet and the Lounge Lizards. Consisting of spiraling melodies, interweaving counterpoint, driving rhythms and introspective passages, Blake's "Party Suite" is a far more dynamic affair than its title suggests. With inventive arrangements, tight ensemble passages and adventurous soloing, Blake's quintet plays an affable variation on post-Bop that is vigorous but highly accessible. He also reveals an eclectic sen-

sibility by expanding the scope of the suite to include an Avant Garde New Orleans funeral march and even a somber Blues. Not one to shy away from his sources of inspiration, the angular zest of "The Chide Grind" recalls vintage Steve Lacy while the unfortunately titled "The Sneaky Dance" invokes the austerity of Eric Dolphy's stately Prestige recordings with a noirish flute and bass clarinet excursion.

Although the titular suite is the album's conceptual centerpiece, the final three cuts demonstrate Blake's more reserved, lyrical writing. These tracks feature upcoming vibraphonist Alexei Tsiganov, who adds considerable color and atmosphere to the proceedings. Blake even digs deep into obscure Jazz lineage with a respectful and lyrically astute cover of Herbie Nichols' "The Spinning Song." As respite from the rousing miasma of "The Party Suite" Blake closes the album with the lifting swing of "Waiting to Change." Recently winning the ASCAP Young Composers Award for this recording should help Blake get the credit he deserves.

Troy Collins

## **NAIMA SHAMBORGUER, FROM MY HEART TO YOURS, SHAMBONES 103.**

*Smile / what Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life / Here's To Life / Fuchsia Mood / Send In The Clowns / Nearness of You / When October Goes / If You Could See Me Now / Lush Life / Sure Thing / I'll be Seeing You / In The Still Of The Night.*

**Shamborguer, vcl; Buddy Budson, p, arr, cond; Marion Hayden, b; Bert Myrick, d; Mahindi Masi, perc; Dwight Adams, tpt; George Benson, as; Steve Turre, tbn; Wendell Harrison, bari s, b cl; Lydia Cleaver, hp; Don Revels, vcl (on "Seeing You" only); Strings - James Greer, Linda Tolias, vln; Leslie DeShazar, vla; Irena Tikhonova, cel; Akua Dixon String Ensemble - Akua Dixon, arr, cond, contractor, cel; Gayle Dixon, Phillip A. Payton, vln; Crystal Garner, via; Kenneth Davis, b. Recording dates not specified - Southfield, MI.**

Damned if I don't hear intimations of Sarah right off the bat, on "Smile," which should give you some idea of how well Naima Shamborguer sings. Even so, this is a very variable showcase for her, primarily because of slack production values, foremost of which is a decided lack of integration between singer and support. I wouldn't be at all surprised to learn (if I only could) that she made this disc by singing to prerecorded instrumental tracks. Even on "Nearness," which has the asset of some very earnest Steve Turre trombone, I had the distinct feeling that singer and instrumental were not all that aware of each other's presence. Then, on "Lush," the single track featuring the Akua Dixon String Ensemble, Ms. S. seems baffled by Dixon's rather astringent arrangement, rather than in sync with it.

It is on this very same track that Ms. S., exercising her inalienable Jazz Canary's right to make lyric adjustments, sings, "To get the feel of life/from Jazz to cocktails" instead of "from Jazz and cocktails." It made me wonder if she really knew what she was singing about. She comes close to the correct pronunciation of "distingué," but not close enough to be convincing, and later,