



Genre: JAZZ

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For immediate release: Sean Nowell - "Stockholm Swingin'"

Straight outta Sweden via New York.

Tenor saxophonist Sean Nowell goes abroad on his latest release "Stockholm Swingin'." With a strong program of new originals songs and a few familiar melodies, the album showcases strong showings by Sean and his working band of Swedish swingers along with the familiarly explosive metrics of his regular cohort, drummer Joe Abba.

With confidence and expertise, Nowell assuredly leads by example and makes the entire session swing, surge and soar beyond the sonic stratosphere to reach new heights and delights. Both critical ears and casual listeners will certainly agree that this album of hard hitting live performances succeeds in encouraging jazz enthusiasts everywhere to dig into "Stockholm Swingin'" again and again with amazement and delight.

tracks

- 1.....Blues On The Corner (Tyner)5:43
- 2.....Ack Värmeland, Du Sköna (trad.)7:32
- 3.....Harlem Woman (Lindberg/Olsson)7:18
- 4.....Amad (Ellington)9:12
- 5.....NY Vibe (Nowell)7:17
- 6.....Chelsea Bridge (Strayhorn)6:09
- 7.....Sweet Night (Lindberg/Olsson)6:16
- 8.....Walking The Path (J. Abba)7:45

players:

- Sean Nowell - tenor saxophone
- Fredrik Olsson - guitar
- Leo Lindberg - piano
- Lars Ekman - bass
- Joe Abba - drums

Posi-Tone Records

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USA Press Quotes:

JazzTimes
AMERICA'S JAZZ MAGAZINE

Real swing knows no geographic or ethnic bounds.

Recorded live in Stockholm and featuring NYC Tenor Saxophonist Sean Nowell and Drummer Joe Abba with Swedish Guitarist Fredrik Olsson, Pianist Leo Lindberg, and Bassist Lars Ekman the cut contains all the groove and pocket you'd expect from a band of New Yorkers.

...the leader demonstrates his deft way with a ballad on a sublime rendition of Billy Strayhorn's "Chelsea Bridge."

Nowell's "NY Vibe" is suitably aggressive and relentlessly swinging, with some pure burn from guitar and tenor sax.

Bill Milkowski - JAZZ TIMES

JAZZ TIMES Top 50 Jazz CDs of 2011

The following list contains selections by both established and emerging artists performing in a variety of styles, and in configurations ranging from duos to big bands (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER). Vocalists are represented, as are recordings of Latin, Brazilian, and Gypsy Jazz, and even jazz-laced reggae. There's something here for just about every taste, and the open-minded jazz fan (the best kind) would most likely enjoy them all.

.....

Sean Nowell-- Stockholm Swingin'

Sonny Rollins-- Road Shows, Vol. 2

Carlo de Rosa's Cross-Fade-- Brain Dance

Samo Salamon's Bassless Trios-- Duality

Bobby Selvaggio-- Grass Roots Movement

Brad Shepik-- Across the Way

Terell Stafford-- This Side of Strayhorn

Dave Serner Quintet-- Sidetracked

Tierney Sutton Band-- American Road

Hristo Vitchev Quintet-- The Perperikon Suite

Jessica Williams-- Freedom Trane

Warren Wolf-- Warren Wolf

Phil Woods and Bill Mays-- Woods and Mays

Miguel Zénon-- Alma Adentro: The Puerto Rican Songbook

Rtako Zjaca and Simone Zanchini-- The Way We Talk

....



What makes the sound of Nowell's tenor saxophone so appealing and refreshing is that he doesn't seem to push it to squeeze out emotion but rather lets the horn and his powerful personality speak direct emotional truths.

...Nowell squawks and howls but with intelligence and logic....

The time spent together makes them sound like a seasoned ensemble and the intimate recording is perfect for this in-the-moment quintet.

Donald Elfman – THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD

BURNING AMBULANCE

a journal of arts and culture

...the feel of a mid-'60s Blue Note session is definitely present and strong, it's Hank Mobley who's most likely to come to mind when listening to Nowell.

His playing on Strayhorn's "Chelsea Bridge" is thick and buzzy, recalling Coleman Hawkins, and the band's backing is sparse, yet powerful, holding strength in reserve to allow the leader to blow lengthy variations on the blues.

...with some very thoughtful, almost Wayne Shorter-esque (the Wayne Shorter of 1964) playing from Nowell....

Stockholm Swingin' is a good, solid live document of a band that knows how to work together and has good taste in material.

Phil Freeman – BURNING AMBULANCE

STEP TEMPEST

JAZZ PIQUES MY INTEREST AND TOUCHES NEARLY EVERY ASPECT OF MY LIFE. CREATIVE MUSIC SHOULD CHALLENGE US, MAKE US THINK AND MOVE US FORWARD.

Gritty sounds but oh-so-fine! "Stockholm Swingin'" satisfies on a number of levels, especially in the way the quintet of musicians work together. They sound like they're having great fun and, no matter the language, that translates into a fine listening experience.

Richard B. Kamins – STEP TEMPEST

JazzWrap

Swingin' is definitely the best way to describe Sean Nowell's third album on Posi-Tone, Stockholm Swingin'. It's a well balanced and straight-ahead killer set from the Alabama native now New Yorker.

Establishing himself as a solid performer and laying in a steady stream of clean accessible rhythms in this live setting, makes Stockholm Swingin' an enjoyable listen and enticing venture for every music fan.

Stretching and flexing notes like Dexter Gordon or Sonny Rollins, Nowell sets a fire in a live session.

...it feels like a Kenny Burrell/John Coltrane session or a flavourful early George Benson album.

Nowell's own "NY Vibe" is cool and bluesy at times. It really does spell out New York for those of us who have experienced the scene for years. A great little number that even my kid was flipping out over.

It's a "burst out of the speakers and spell the presence of an real entertainer" performance from Nowell.

...a buoyancy and vitality that blisters with life.

With Stockholm Swingin' you get the feeling if you've been listening to Sean Nowell for awhile and that he really let the wheels off the wagon and just went for it this time. This is a live session that works on many levels. It's perfect for many traditionalists and a nice opening for new fans.

This is the sound of modern standard jazz. It is good for all. Enjoy...



On *Stockholm Swingin'*, the tenor saxophonist's third Posi-Tone release, he stays in recognizably straight-ahead territory, bringing his impressively wide-ranging and imaginative tenor sound to a live quintet recording from the Swedish capital's Glenn Miller Café....

The quintet sounds cool, confident and swinging....

...a beautifully-crafted album, with fine contributions from each of the quintet's members. The quality of the live recording is also superb....

Bruce Lindsay – ALL ABOUT JAZZ



Nowell's biting tenor leads this charged-up quintet. The Alabama native devours the blues on McCoy Tyner's "Blues on the Corner" and the up-tempo flavor of his own composition "NY Vibe." Not the least bit bashful of his willingness to swing, Nowell rides gracefully through Billy Strayhorn's "Chelsea Bridge."

Abba and Ekman build up unrelenting grooves, especially on Abba's Latin-type tune "Walking the Path." Lindberg and Olsson contribute searing solo turns to this all around high-energy, swingin' affair. John Barron – THE JAZZ WORD



...this set stands out because of the musical chemistry of this group and the way they shape a song. Abba does a fantastic job crafting dynamic/dramatic rhythmic arcs within a piece ("Walking The Path"), and Nowell, whether attached at the hip to guitarist Fredrik Olsson or setting a song ablaze with his saxophone, leads with class and authority. Pianist Leo Lindberg is often the "Yang" to Nowell's "Yin," providing chordal responses to the saxophonist's statements ("Amad") and countering his modern-leaning solos with a bluesy approach, and Ekman rounds out the group, providing solid, yet flexible bass work that bolsters the band from below....

"Harlem Woman" is driven by Abba's firm swing and Ekman's sturdy bass lines, but the soloists really own this one. Duke Ellington's "Amad," from his *Far East Suite* (RCA, 1967), takes the band in a different rhythmic direction with its Middle Eastern flavor and exotic sound and a second helping of Ellingtonia, in the form of Billy Strayhorn's "Chelsea Bridge," features some of Nowell's most sublime work of the set.

While Nowell's first two albums were first-class musical outings, *Stockholm Swingin'* is simply his best thus far. The third time really is a charm.

Dan Bilawsky – ALL ABOUT JAZZ



From the opening notes of Blues On The Corner to the final audience applause following Walking The Path, Sean Nowell does not disappoint.

Nowell possesses a big, beefy, traditional tenor sound reminiscent of early Sonny Rollins and other legendary tenor saxophonists of the 20th century. His hard-swinging lines on his opening choruses of Blues On The Corner pay homage to virtually every tenor man who came before this relatively young jazz ambassador.

Nowell's group sound completely at home with the blues.

Sean Nowell's tenor playing shines brightly on his solo taken just before the final chorus. His lines are original, clever and technical little gems to behold.

A classic and yet contemporary sound of New York jazz.

Nowell crafts a wonderfully creative improvisation. His bending, swooping tenor here showcases yet another stylistic side of this very competent tenor man.

Nowell solos with ferocity. His angry tenor pushes forward, culminating in a flurry of alternate fingerings taking him high into the altissimo. The climax of his solo comes in the middle, gradually winding down on the final chorus and the final head.

Nowell weaves in and out of tonality, as does the rhythm section behind him. It is clear the ensemble is having a blast.

Stockholm Swingin' is a delightful example of traditional, straight-ahead jazz, beautiful produced by Marc Free and Posi-Tone Records.

Sitting back and listening, this writer can't help but want to pick the horn and join in.

–SAXSHED.com



A tenor sax man from Alabama that managed to find that corner on 52nd St where the southern migration brought the church to the big apple showing he knows how to swing it like a real first call player.

....a straight ahead set that is on the money throughout.

– Chris Spector – MIDWEST RECORD



My expectations of a great musical evening were met

Sean Nowell is a consummate musician with a powerful tenor style deeply rooted in the tradition. Though he recalls giants like Dexter Gordon, Sonny Rollins and Joe Henderson he is his own man. With power, lyricism and swing he stands on his feet rooted in past and present equally.

We were treated to an odyssey of standards and originals. The band brings to mind the classic John Coltrane/Kenny Burrell recordings, with clever guitarist Olsson picking the juiciest parts out of jazz guitar history, melding it together in his own way. Leo Lindberg at the piano surely is the next star of jazz piano, proving this in many exciting solo ventures. Lars Ekman on bass and Joe Abba at the drums drove the band with rhythmically exhilarating grooves. Five out of five Stars. – Sundsvalls Tidning



Jazz is alive and well

The big, round sound of Sean Nowells lyrical, yet brawny tenor saxophone encompasses the lion's share of modern jazz history. This group proves that great music can stand on its own without gimmicks or showboating. Travelling straight down the main stream of jazz, they offered hard bop classics, evergreens as well as original compositions, all delivered with fire and great swing. Highlights included Nowells intense New York Vibe, a restrained but not sentimental Summertime and Horace Silver's The Cape Verdean Blues. Drummer Joe Abba drives the band with varied precision, laying down complex grooves that still set your feet tapping. Fredrik Olsson's guitar really shines on many occasions and Leo Lindberg's pianistic prowess is strikingly mature. Lars Ekman on bass is not only a groover, but is an exciting soloist, be it pizzicato or bowed. Jazz is very much alive. And we are grateful. – Hela Hälsingland



"The coolest club I've ever played in!"

Thus spoke Sean Nowell from the stage. It was clear that he loved Metropol. And Metropol loved him right back. Nowell's saxophone playing is swift, powerful, relaxed and fully focused. There is not a musical sentence he utters that is without meaning. The same goes for the fantastic Joe Abba on the drums. I can't seem to recall hearing a drummer with such precise time feel. Also, he's a team player. Fredrik Olsson is an experience for the the eye as well as the ear. After each dazzling solo he positions himself as an intense listener to his fellow bandmates. Lars Ekman on acoustic bass and Leo Lindberg on piano rounded out the group. Lindberg is a unique talent. At 18 he plays jazz piano with offhand ease. A brilliant night at Metropol. – Tidningen Ångermanland



Happiest at full speed

A wonderful start of the spring season. A great group made up of Swedish and American musicians provided something special to the audience at Pelles Lusthus. Leader Sean Nowell was not only a full toned musical communicator, but also a experienced and warm MC, giving the rest of the band generous introductions. Deservedly so. At the grand piano was merely 18 year old Leo Lindberg, dazzling with his knowledge of jazz piano history from Garner to Duke and beyond. Bassist Kristian Lind was in supreme control regardless of tempo and his partner in time, drummer Joe Abba, was simply masterful: truly playing as opposed to drumming. At times driving and explosive, but mostly a master of less is more. Guitarist Fredrik Olsson brought his Gibson on dazzling weightless rides, reaching the highest on his and Leo's own Harlem Woman, a wonderfully streetsmart number.

Ensemble parts were played with the utmost precision, whether on hard bop classics or the digestible and entertaining originals. The band was at it's happiest at full speed, but the longest lasting memory was Sean Nowell's reading of the gorgeous ballad Stars fell on Alabama. – Södermanlands Nyheter



The Seeker (Posi-Tone Records)

Originally from Birmingham, Alabama and influenced by the southern tradition of blues, gospel and jazz, tenor saxophonist and composer Sean Nowell unleashes his second project for the Posi-Tone Records with a command performance in a fiery passion-filled eight-piece barn-burner of a recording with "The Seeker." Playing with the sophistication of a John Coltrane and the grace of a Lee Konitz, Nowell unfurls the sax for intense tenor work dominating the band and delivering an excellent session of straight ahead contemporary jazz elevating "The Seeker" to an elite category.

Recording with a sextet of young and hungry players who prove their mettle here, Nowell is joined once again by pianist Art Hirahara and drummer Joe Abbatantuono who performed on his first Posi-Tone CD "Fireworks." Rounding out the rhythm section are bassist Thomson Kneeland, guitarist Nir Felder and Dave Eggar performing on cello. The result of course is a terrific spacious sound produced by a small and tight ensemble that sound like they've been together for more than one recording.

The music opens up with an energetic bursts from Nowell's tenor announcing an electrifying vibrant ride on his original "New York Vibe," where the saxophonist goes off on a torrid tare of a solo leading the band over a lively landscape of hard-bop. Pianist Hirahara follows the leader with an enticing performance of his own on the lively opener. Nowell changes direction on the Raye/DePaul standard "You Don't Know What Love Is," as he tones it down and drives a softer tone here respecting the melody for its heartfelt mood.

Nowell mixes a bit of the World music sound with a taste of the Middle Eastern/Jewish sound on the interesting "Oy Matze Matze" then gently returns to a more traditional approach on the cushy ballad-like "Dunavski Park" delivering another exquisite tenor phrasing. The program ends with a somber read to the Lennon/McCartney tune "I Will," where the drummer's cymbal accents and cellist Eggar come to the forefront with their play and by contrast putting a very fine exclamation point on one of the most up beat and rapid-paced renditions to the Schertzingler/Johnny Mercer classic "I Remember You" one will ever hear.

Edward Blanco - EJAZZ News



The Seeker (Posi-Tone Records)

Tenor sax ace Sean Nowell's second date as a leader provides some insight into his broad musical vernacular, since the Birmingham, AL., native has composed film scores and has performed master classes in Europe on American jazz. He also incorporates snippets of European folk music and other world music aspects into his repertoire, largely based on the progressive jazz idiom.

Nowell's hearty tone and fluid delivery is built upon lots of gusto and soaring lines. However, it's not all about fire and brimstone, evidenced on You

Don't Know What Love Is, featuring Thomas Kneeland's pensive, bowed-bass solo and cellist Dave Eggar's sonorous articulations. Moreover, the saxophonist intersperses a catchy North African motif into this piece. Otherwise, Eggar adds a novel dimension to three tracks, as he often takes the edge off and calms the waters along with Nowell's rapidly flowing choruses and shifting tides.

The sextet goes on a tear within intermittent passages, where Nowell pushes the band into intense dialogues, often abetted by pianist Art Hirahara's deft phrasings and sizzling right hand leads. On Johnny Mercer's I Remember You, Nowell goes full throttle by spinning an up-tempo bop groove, spiced with a Latin rhythmic vibe during the choruses. Here, the band explores an amalgamation of mini-themes while drummer Joe Abbatantuono roughs it up via his polyrhythmic bombardment towards the finale.

Nowell strikes a chord with these high-impact pieces, topped off by his memorable compositions and cleverly engineered arrangements. He differentiates himself from the norm, throughout the often-captivating sequence of musical events, brimming with fresh sounds and the frontline's zealous soloing breakouts.

Glenn Astarita - Jazzreview.com



Instead of *The Seeker*, Sean Nowell could have used "New York Vibe" as the title for his second Posi-Tone disc. The blistering opening track oozes Big Apple attitude, though not from the current century. The feeling is closer to a mid-20th century Apple, with Checker cabs flying across the Brooklyn Bridge and candle-lit supper clubs thick with cigarette smoke. Nowell's bold, snarling tenor could have easily come from that era, and Art Hirahara's percussive piano is just as muscular. Together they bring an uncompromising East Coast mindset to flame-throwing Nowell originals and timeless standards.

It's not all strolls down the sidewalks of Noo Yawk. Cellist Dave Eggar sends the East Coast vibe into a Middle Eastern direction with a mystical version of the Yiddish traditional "Oy Matze Matze." Eggar also brings out the loss in a melancholy opening section of Lennon & McCartney's "I Will," and contributes exquisite harmony to Nowell's own "Jamie's Decision." (Nowell takes the harmony a step further by double-tracking himself on flute.) *The Seeker* is like a Mariano Rivera fastball: it flies right down Broadway, daring anyone to try and lay a bat on it. That won't happen, because there's nothing to do but nod in admiration as the ball flies by, straight and true.

J Hunter – All About Jazz Online (Aug 4, 2009)



The Seeker (Posi-Tone Records)

Apropos enough of an album title here; from leaving behind his Alabama a cappella choir in favor of the big east cities to bombing Kosovo with culture and jamming soundtracks with Stanley Clarke, Nowell's life is officially a circus of art. On this 2nd album for Posi-Tone as a leader, however, the surprise lies in the conventionality of his passion for small-combo 50s/60s avant-jazz/post-bop, here branching into uncommon ethnicities (the wizened Jewish flavor of "Oy Matze Matze"), subliminal bar-rock beats ("Dunavski Park") and chicken soup for the gangster's moll's soul ("I Will," a nice space for some Humphrey Bogart dialog). "New York Vibe" is pure Blue Note oldschool, with Nowell taking a 3.5 minute solo he probably concocted while playing the Manhattan clubs in which he's a resident; other sizzle is found between the fusion basslines and psychedelics of "For All Intensive Purposes." The brain-blower comes last, in the warp-speed Coltrane-like closeout track "I Remember You." Grade: A-

– Skope Magazine



The Seeker (Posi-Tone Records)

"Jamie's Decision" is a fetching Sean Nowell composition that encourages repeat listening. The gorgeous melody allows Nowell's rich saxophone timbre to lull you into its spell. Just when you start to get comfortable, he changes the time signature to bring you about. Eggar's cello meshes nicely with Nowell's saxophone and Hirahara's piano, which gives the proceedings the quality of chamber jazz.. Abbatantuono produces a rich assortment of percussive sounds that fill in the lulls at precisely the right places and move the piece along without ever being brash. This is a little gem of a composition that is satisfyingly complete as it builds and releases tension with an accomplished air of subdued maturity.

Ralph A. Miriello – Jazz.com



It would be foolish to describe saxophonist Sean Nowell as a 21st century schizoid tenor man, but two distinct strands characterize the New York-based player's work. On the one hand, Nowell is active in funk and post-fusion styles, with his own Kung-Fu Masters and MonAtomic groups, among other line-ups. On the other hand, he's a precociously talented straight ahead player, with a gritty and exuberant approach displaying traces of such illustrious forebears as Dexter Gordon, John Coltrane and Michael Brecker.

The two strands overlap, of course, as do the personnel of the bands. But so far, under his own name, Nowell's studio focus has been on straight ahead performance, first with *Firewerks* (Positone 2007), and now with *The Seeker*, on which he moves between the fierce and forceful and the lush and voluptuous to devastating effect.

On *Firewerks*, Nowell led a two-saxophones and rhythm section quintet. On *The Seeker* he fronts a quartet, with pianist Art Hirahara and drummer Joe Abbatantuono held over from the earlier album and joined by new bassist Thomson Kneeland. There are cameo roles for two guests, cellist Dave Eggar and guitarist Nir Felder, whose brief appearances, Eggar's especially, are quite wonderful.

As the opening track title suggests, *The Seeker's* predominant vibe is a modern day re-energization of the East Coast hard bop of the 1950s and 1960s. Nowell stays mainly on the "inside," Hiraha veers closer to Andrew Hill or Cecil Taylor than he does to Sonny Clark or Wynton Kelly, and Abbatantuono and Kneeland attack with a hard bop vigor dusted with successive decades' rhythmic dalliances, including funk, jazz-rock and fusion. The result is a chili-hot stew of galvanizing intensity.

Nowell, the chief soloist, also turns his hand, with sumptuous effect, to a couple of ballad covers, Lennon and McCartney's "I Will" and the particularly gorgeous, Don Raye and Gene De Paul composed "You Don't What Love Is." Eggar's cello, in lovely counterpoint with Nowell, states the themes of the traditional Bulgarian folk tune "Oy Matze Matze," Nowell's astringent "Jamie's Decision" and "I Will." It's on these tracks that the muscular balladeering of Dexter Gordon comes to mind.

The album closes with a galloping reading of Victor Schertzinger and Johnny Mercer's "I Remember You." Written in 1941, its pace and attack here are totally 2009 and Nowell and Hirahara's solos range further "out" than they do elsewhere. A reminder, if one were needed, that style categorization remains an inexact science.

Chris May – All About Jazz Online (Aug 20, 2009)



"The Seeker" finds tenor saxophonist Sean Nowell traveling across a vast harmonic spectrum to a place filled with intriguing melodies and rhythmic world beats. With roots based in the deep South, Nowell's background is quite diverse compared to that of most members of the New York jazz circuit. On "The Seeker", he offers hints of Southern blues, gospel, and funk roots, combined with a truly complex and unique sense of harmony to create an album filled with joy and wonder.

Nowell takes listeners on a bold musical journey with a New York Vibe, stretching the band's abilities to the limit with horn sounds that are instantly recognizable, yet seemingly brand new. With each note Nowell impresses more, even when tackling the Lennon/McCartney composition "I Will". Altogether, "The Seeker" must be considered a candidate as one of the finest jazz releases of the year.

Fred Adams – Honest Tune (Aug 4, 2009)



The group dynamic is a powerful force in jazz. Tenor saxophonist Sean Nowell recognizes that with The Seeker, a set of songs that demonstrate his abilities as a leader, songwriter and soloist, but doesn't ignore those around him.

Nowell hails from Birmingham, Alabama. Versed in several styles of music, he has also traveled world-wide and has worked with musicians, actors, dancers and many others throughout his career. In addition to playing jazz in New York clubs, Nowell has scored films and served as musical director for a theater company. Accompanying him are pianist Art Hirahara, bassist Thomas Kneeland and drummer Joe Abbatantuono. Cellist David Eggar and guitarist Nir Felder also make appearances.

"New York Vibe" is aptly named. The high-energy pace, the momentary stops are like a night drive through the city. Abbatantuono's hi-hat work is striking, with bass and piano also making their mark. Nowell leads on tenor sax, exploring its lower range on several phrases, but quickly bouncing back to the middle, occasionally stretching to the upper reaches, even screeching at one point. Hirahara follows with a solo and, after repeating the melody, Nowell finishes the song with a series of high-note wails.

The bass subtly begins "Oy Matze Matze," soon joined by drums and piano. Nowell comes in, accompanied in counterpoint by Eggar. The song has a Far Eastern feel during the soft passage, but as the intensity picks up, it's an unrestrained, no-holds-barred jam. After Nowell's high-pitch grind ends his solo, Kneeland steps up for a solo, accompanied only by drums and piano. Nowell and Eggar blend during the closing sequence, which repeats the earlier melody but with greater intensity.

"For All Intensive Purposes" is as its title implies. Felder joins the ensemble for this near-frantic piece. Guitar and sax are as one during several phrases, splitting when appropriate. Nowell's solo is loaded with stop-and-go action. While the background tempo remains the same, Nowell easily shifts from rapid notes in succession to sustained tones. Abbatantuono is in a zone on the cymbals during Hirahara's solo. Felder fills during the melody, but again joins Nowell in a hard-charging end.

The Seeker is eight tracks of free-flowing music. Nowell, who wrote four of the songs, is the focus, but the supporting cast is deeply involved from start to finish, making for a solid group outing.

Woodrow Wilkins – All About Jazz Online (Aug 23, 2009)



"The Seeker" CD RELEASE @ SMALLS

One of the greatest aspects of being a jazz critic in New York City is the element of discovery. To be asked to attend a performance by an emerging jazz artist, one with whom I have not previously been familiar, and then to be blown away by their performance is one of the joys of jazz. Hence add another interesting and creative musician to my list. His name is Sean Nowell. Nowell is a monster tenor saxophonist from Alabama who is slowly taking hold of the New York City scene. With extremely refreshing compositions and chops that would make Tony Atlas proud – I would advise the New York City jazzbo to keep an eye out on Mr. Nowell.

On this gorgeous New York evening at Smalls Jazz Club, the Sean Nowell Group (as he calls it) were taking the stage to celebrate his latest release. The set opened up with a track titled "New York Vibe" from the new Posi-Tone release entitled The Seeker. And may I add – after getting a copy of this disc it is clearly up for running as a top ten in my collection for 2009. The opener slid in with a drum intro from Joe Abbatantuono, which led right into the head, attracting the listener's attention and drawing one in instantly. Nowell's compositions are not only a demonstration of some serious tenor playing, but his melody lines are very catchy. The piece featured exceptional solos by Nowell, his guitar counterpart Nir Felder and Art Hirahara on piano. I can't overstate how important to take hold of a crowd right out of the gate and Nowell did just that. He had me!

"New York Vibe" was followed up by a composition titled "Domnowski Park" – which again featured Nowell grabbing the tune by the horns and showing his mastery of the tenor saxophone. This selection featured a gorgeous piano solo by Hirahara.

Next up was my personal favorite of the evening – a tune titled "Oy Masti Masti" which featured a very European style type feel and Mr. David Eggar on cello, who was simply incredible. Again tremendous saxophone work from Nowell, an eye-popping solo from Eggar, and a very funk based guitar solo from Felder had you wanting more.

Mr. Nowell was also very personable, engaging the audience as he explained the stories behind the songs.

The evenings first set closed with a gorgeous arrangement of the Beatles tune "I Will" which was simply beautiful. A top-notch arrangement and another fantastic solo from cellist Eggar was just what the arrangement ordered.

Well it happened on this night again. I was not familiar with tenor saxophonist Sean Nowell – and now I'm a fan, very much enjoying his new release titled The Seeker.

Christopher Lams – Jazz Inside New York (Aug 4, 2009)

Live Performance Reviews

Sean Nowell Group Smalls Jazz Club July, 2009

By Christopher Lams

One of the greatest aspects of being a jazz critic in New York City is the element of discovery. To be asked to attend a performance by an emerging jazz artist, one with whom I have not previously been familiar, and then to be blown away by their performance is one of the joys of jazz. Hence add another interesting and creative musician to my list. His name is Sean Nowell. Nowell is a monster tenor saxophonist from Alabama who is slowly taking hold of the New York City scene. With extremely refreshing compositions and chops that would make Tony Atlas proud - I would advise the New York City jazzbo to keep an eye out on Mr. Nowell.

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John Pizzarelli and Guests The Pizza Party Birdland, New York City June 23-27, 2009

By Joe Lang

John Valenti, owner of Birdland, sure knows how to throw a party! All you need do is to hire John Pizzarelli, ask him to bring along a crew of swinging cohorts, and *voila*, "The Pizza Party" happens, with an explosion of terrific music bringing the crowd to one peak of enjoyment after another.

It is not only the music that satisfies, but also the charismatic and witty personality of Pizzarelli who is as fast with a quip as anyone on the scene today. His humorous between song patter, full of hip references, and gentle joshing of acquaintances in the audience, brings a special extra element of entertainment to a first rate jazz experience.

On Thursday evening of the five-day run, Pizzarelli and his guitar was joined by vocalists Jessica Molasky (Mrs. Pizzarelli) and Rebecca Kilgore, tenor saxophonist Harry Allen, violinist Aaron Weinstein, pianist Larry Fuller, bassist Martin Pizzarelli and drummer Tony Tedesco. This is a group of superior jazz players who also know how to project a sense of enthusiasm and joy in their performances.

"Lady Be Good" served as the opener, with each of the players given an opportunity to strut their stuff in the spotlight, highlighted by Pizzarelli's scating in unison with his guitar explorations. There were several Pizzarelli originals on the program, one devoted to the selections from the new Arbors CD *PIZZARELLI Party with the Arbors All Stars*. One of these, "Strollin' Down to Nola," a tribute to the New York City recording studio where the album was recorded, proved to be an engaging bluesy number that felt instantly familiar. "Joe and Zoot," a feature for Weinstein and Allen, is Pizzarelli's nod to the musi-

cally fruitful, though only occasional, pairing of Joe Venuti and Zoot Sims. These cats impressively proved why they are among the brightest of the legatees of the two legendary past masters.

Pizzarelli went into his vocal mode with a smooth rendering of "Under a Blanket of Blue," the beginning of the vocal section of the evening. He was soon joined by Kilgore and Molasky on "We Take on the Town," another Pizzarelli tune that is catchy and fun. The ladies gave a knowing reading of "I Knew Him When," before Kilgore gave us her take on "Pennies from Heaven," with some scatted assistance from Pizzarelli, and a sublime version of one of those tunes that you hear and wonder why it is not more frequently performed, "I'm Making Believe," penned by Mack Gordon and James V. Monaco. Molasky returned to advise us to "Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams." Both of these ladies are superior jazz influenced vocalists who understand lyrics and phrasing in a way that few others do.

It was time to give the spotlight over to the other Pizzarelli, brother and bassist Martin for "You Be the Judge," a loving tribute to one of the great jazz bassists of them all, Milt Hinton. No John Pizzarelli gig would seem complete without his revisiting his biggest crowd pleaser, "I Like Jersey Best." With the broadly beaming composer/lyricist Joe Cosgriff looking on, Pizzarelli interpolated his impressions of a multitude of other singers, including Paul Simon, Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, Lou Rawls and several others, into his extended and raucous version of this wacky and wonderful song. When he alternated between his impressions of Billie Holiday and Madeleine Peyroux, with no variation between the two, it brought down the house.

To bring this highly entertaining evening to a conclusion, Pizzarelli brought all instrumental hands back on deck for another of his new tunes, "Somebody Called Hanley," and they left all on hand satisfied, but sorry that this interlude of unadulterated good times had come to an end. ■

"You have to know what you want to get. But when you know that, let it take you. And if it seems to take you off the track, don't hold back because that is instinctively where you want to be. And if you hold back and try to be always where you have been before, you will go dry."

—Gertrude Stein



all-about-jazz

Fireworks
Posi-Tone Records

By Phil DiPietro
March 2007

Nowell and his quintet have succeeded at melding, morphing and mixing the best of Blue Note-era small-group nirvana with the Headhunters' pocket and vibe, evolving it to right now. This is not merely attributable to great writing and playing, but innovative arranging between the dual horn attack of tenorist Nowell and altoist Travis Sullivan, as padded and parried by Art Hirahara's ultra-hip Rhodes. A hard-driving horn man from Alabama, Nowell's now a New Yorker and member of Sullivan's Bjorkestra, of which this entire unit is a scintillating subset.

A modern sinewy dual horn line kick-starts "Pale," abetted by Joe Abbatantuono's modern rock beats and bassist Danny Zanker's slinky and bomb-like acoustic accents. This is supplanted by what I'll call Nowell and Sullivan's "home sound," one that could be conjured by a front-line of saxophonists Stanley Turrentine and Sonny Criss until it starts to dance around each other in a motivic counter-melody so tightly written and arranged it sounds improvised.

Nowell's first solo shows his big-tenor influences and up-to-the minute chops, punctuated by tasteful over-blowing running perfectly counter to the gutbucket jam, then growing Brecker-esquely dense. Sullivan doesn't wait for the bar line on a perfectly executed handoff, while showing he's an equally gifted soloist, adding Criss-like breathiness, classic alto rasp and finally, modern angularity to the mix. Hirahara seamlessly runs first into atmospheric territory, abetted by Abbatantuono's stops and starts. The drummer's dexterity on the bell of the ride and snare propels the Rhodes man to elasticize the funk into uncharted territory before bringing it home linearly and exiting on a new motif.

San Francisco transplant Hirahara is the session's most "out-of-nowhere" revelation, so potent a soloist and colorist it seems at times as though it's his date, as on the sultry "Resolution of Self," similarly centered on unison, then separately supportive dual horn lines. Changing chords on each note of the latter portion of the horn line, the Rhodes urgently recontextualizes each second of their freefall. Horns drop out to leave a Rhodes trio. Hirahara counterbalances a restatement of the head, right against left, languidly linearizing into a solo growing more rhythmically precise, finally allowing slower lines to overrun each other with vintage sustain. The set's catchiest number, using four bars of five and containing two notes each, it seems a rip-off of a classic horn line, but isn't. The pre-ending motif is particularly effective as the two notes restate, but climb in a simple scalar fashion seducing you into a smoky sixties vibe.

Another highlight is "Inner Universe," Nowell's drum 'n' bass-driven rearrangement of a song by Anime composer Yoko Kanno that serves as a shreddingly satisfying modern tribute.

Tempting as it is to say Nowell's concept, and the fresh-faced cast assembled here to translate it, portends great things, it's untrue—they've already delivered one.

Alabama born, New York resident Sean Nowell's second CD, "The Seeker," so impressed me that I had to search out his debut, "Firewerks." Imagine acoustic Chick Corea's Return and Steely Dan mixed with Herbie Hancock, John Coltrane, and Sonny Rollins. That paints a good picture of what goes on in this instrumental jazz record recorded at The Cutting Room in New York City of January 2006. Produced and engineered by J. Chris Griffin, the CD features Sean Nowell (tenor sax), Travis Sullivan (alto sax), Art Hirahara (Fender Rhodes), Danny Zanker (acoustic bass), and Joe Abbatantuono (drums).

Penning six of the eight tunes here, Nowell proves himself an adept composer. Chromaticism, rather than blues, colors this record. He varies the rhythms from swing ("Resolution of Self"), funk ("Maklahj"), rock ("Inner Universe"), ballad ("Lament for Arnold") to Latin ("Shahazaraz") -- sometimes all in the same song ("Folding Space")! Nowell provides the players with interesting and challenging chord progressions. Unlike a rock record where soloists lock into a groove and ride it like a wave, here the musicians dart over and under the groove, even shifting it by sheer force of will.

The dual horn line of Nowell and Sullivan plays the head of most of these tunes. It takes a very confident man to feature another sax player on your first album! Both musicians acquit themselves with a lot of tone, range, and creativity. The sentient rhythm section of Danny Zanker and Joe Abbatantuono respond instantly to every nuance of every solo. Keyboardist Art Hirahara acts as the glue with his preternatural pushing, padding, and grasping. The whole group plays with ears wide open, totally in the present. Like fully engaged lovers, the music breathes with emotion. Instruments join in and fall out in a thoroughly natural fashion.

Intelligent music rocks my boat. In an age of scripted "reality" shows that play to the lowest common denominator, I get all "verklemt" when I listen to genuine, emotional, beautifully crafted, improvisational music. Thank you Sean Nowell for raising your head above this cultural wasteland.

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Why did you call the album Fireworks?

I'm from Alabama and we like to blow stuff up down there. I grew up around fireworks trailers selling every variation of explosives known to man. I like to think that my band can be as volatile at times. Suddenly exploding when you least expect it. And possibly losing a finger or two.

Does Southern music influence what you do?

Even though I've learned a bit about complex harmonies and rhythmic structures by being in NYC and touring and jamming with guys all over Eastern Europe and South America, I will invariably end up playing some blues in whatever musical context I'm in. I can't help it. It's just in there.

What Southern musicians influenced you?

When I was coming up, the local Birmingham cats like [trumpeter] Bo Berry, [tenor saxophonist] Neil McClean (who was also one of my early teachers), [guitarist] Mark Kimbrell, and [bassist] Oteil Burbrige had a profound effect on me. They still do. Those are still some of the most honestly expressive musicians I have ever seen. They showed me that it's important to try to destroy your instrument in the most musical way possible.

How did you write the music for this record?

Each composition is based on life experiences I've had. Sometimes these experiences are so strong, the tunes almost write themselves. For example, "Pale" was written after I saw Edward Norton on stage in Langford Wilson's "Burn This". When his character, Pale, walked on stage, the energy jumped to 100%. His performance inspired me so much that the song was blasting in my mind on the subway ride home. When I got back to my apartment, I just wrote it all down. All I really do I sing melodies, transcribe them and then color them with harmonies on the Rhodes.

Wayne Shorter seems to be a heavy influence on your compositions. What attracts you to his style?

It's all about the melodic writing and the dark colors. I can hear the melody throughout the improvisations with Wayne. The stronger the melodies, the more unique each composition is.

If your compositions are based on personal experience, then what about your playing?

In high school, people used to say I looked like I was wrestling with the saxophone. Like it was some wild animal that was trying to break free. That's the beauty of abstract instrumental music. It's very subjective. My most angry and acid spitting performance could be a positive and life affirming experience for the listener. If I expressed the feelings in words that I do through music, I would probably either have fewer friends or wind up in jail.

The band on this record achieves an empathetic interplay that shows you're all listening hard. Did you choose these players because of their big ears?

My whole intent for this record was to document my working band. We had weekly gigs in various locales in Manhattan and Brooklyn for 2 years before I decided it was time to record. And of course the band sounds even better now. It's really all about the interplay in the rhythm section to keep the tunes fresh and energetic. I always encourage the guys to play as freely as possible over my forms. Personally, I would much rather contribute to the band sound and mix it up with the drums than to just soar over the top and be a soloist. If you can earn the trust of the rhythm section and get the drummer on your side the gigs will always be slamming.

Interview by Pete Williams July 2007





KUNG-FU MASTERS
Live at Spike Hill
Apr 9, 2009

Despite squeezing onto Spike Hill's diminutive stage like 1950's college kids in a phone booth, the performance of the Kung Fu Masters was anything but limited. The humble jazz fusion group dished up enough mind-bogglingly elaborate sounds over the course of an hour to satisfy a mutant millipede with ears in lieu of legs.

If the Kung Fu Masters were their own country, music making would be a highly democratic process, with each of the outstanding musicians standing out equally (with one exception). Digitally echoed sax introductions resounded timelessly in a canyon of psychedelic chords, each likely containing more than a half dozen pitches. The two keyboardists (curiously seated at right angles) emitted sounds ranging from creepy organ dissonance to funky "wah-wah" flickers to vintage electric piano flourishes and mercurial solos. Despite striking up quite a frenzy, the drummer showed no signs of exertion thanks to his impressive economy of motion.

In terms of genre, the Masters demonstrated an eclectic update on the more cerebral music that emerged from the 1970's, such as progressive rock and Sweetnighter-era Weather Report. While the nearly anarchic harmony suggested free jazz, the boundaries between sections and Indian/math-rock-like timings showed clean synchronization. Song #3's turtle tempo and mournful psychedelic mood illustrated the group's more emotional shades, and intricacies like a loud introductory synthesizer buzz and a Jew's harp-like effect further extended the auditory palate. The end of the show's second piece consisted of a slow, bluesy chorus-like section, driven by giant organ chords and repeated seemingly ad infinitum; the only thing missing from this gospel song was a belting church choir.

As the music spoke for itself, stage presence and ornamental motions were not particularly necessary. The Masters were packed sardine-style on the stage, making such things almost impossible and unadvisable anyway. The bass player's relative abundance of elbowroom permitted him to sway in an odd-looking multi-dimensional fashion, which detracted from the visual experience of the band. As the bandleader, the saxophonist naturally exuded the highest level of stage presence. Instead of histrionic dance-like movements, this was manifested in a muscular physique and amusing patter prior to the evening's third song (described faux-seductively as "one for the ladies").

More than mere entertainment, the band proved themselves to be masters of the fusion universe, saturating each air molecule with sonic sophistication. Catching them at a longer show with a bigger stage is highly recommended.

En överraskning som gick hem

Måndagsjazzen, Aveny: Sean Nowell Quintet

Igår kväll bjöd Måndagsjazzen på en för mig helt ny bekantskap i form av Sean Nowell Quintet med Sean själv på tenorsax, Leo Lindberg, piano, Fredrik Olsson, gitarr, Lars Ekman, bas, och Joe Abba, trummor. Jag hade inga särskilda förväntningar förutom att det skulle bli en musikaliskt härlig afton. Min förväntan slog in, det blev en musikkväll som jag och den övriga publiken hade stor behållning av. Vi fick vara med om en variationsrik odyssey bland egna kompositioner och standardrepertoarens mest färgrika perenner som Horace Silvers Sister Sadie, George Gershwins Summertime, Oliver Nelsons Cascades med flera.

Utän vidare jämförelser tror jag att 50-talskvintetten med John Coltrane & Kenny Burrell har stått modell när Nowell satt samman sin egen grupp. Släktskapet kändes nära.

Sean Nowell visade sig vara en mycket driven musikanter och i hans kraftfulla tenorspel kunde man spåra influenser från bland andra Dexter Gordon, Sonny Rollins och Joe Henderson utan att han på något sätt slaviskt följt i deras upptrampade spår. Med dessa förebilder som riktmarke har han format sin personliga formuleringkonst. Som sina inspirationskällor spelar han med pondus, kraftfullt och svängigt. Han har också en imponerande meritlista som visar att spelat med namn som Dave Douglas, Wayne Shorter, Donny Caslin, Stanley Clarke, George Duke och många fler. Med den konkurrens som råder i USA måste man vara extra ordinar för att få spela de här artisterna.

Gitarristen Fredrik Olsson visade med sitt läckra spel att han kunde gitarrjazzens historia utan och innan. Han hade plockat de bästa bitarna från storheter som Barney Kessel, Herb Ellis, Jim Hall, Joe Pass, Kenny Burrell, George Benson med flera och smält samma dessa till ett eget uttrycksätt. Han växlade mellan fylliga ackord och snabba singelstringlopningar på ett medryckande sätt.

Vårt lilla land har en radda fina pianister som gott och väl hävdar sig på de internationella arenorna. I går fick vi höra ytterligare ett tillskott till dessa, 18-åriga supertalangen Leo Lindberg som utan att darra på

manschetten visade upp ett moget och högkvalificerat pianospel som bara kan leda åt ett håll, till den yppersta toppen. Han spelade med ett spänstigt anslag, rytmiskt och kreativt i många spännande soloutflykter. Att han inspirerats av bland andra McCoy Tyner, Wynton Kelly och Horace Silver gör ju inte det hela samma precis. Vi har nästa stora pianist i Leo Lindberg så lägg namnet på minnet.

Bakom ovannämnda fanns ett sammansvetsat komp med Lars Ekmans bärande basgångar och Joe Abbas rytmiskt pådrivande trumspel. Sammanfattningsvis visade Sean Nowell Quintet att överraskningarnas tid är inte förbi. Äter en fullpoängare!



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[Stäng](#)



Ännu en fullträff på Måndagsjazzen:
"Överraskningarnas
tid är inte förbi" 27

Sean Nowell och hans kvintett imponerade på STS-recensent Hans-Erik Bergman.

FOTO: SARA SALLINER



Sean Nowell Quintet konserterade i Hudiksvall på tisdagskvällen. Här syns Fredrik Olsson på gitarr, Lars Ekman på bas och Sean Nowell på tenorsax. FOTO: LARS SUNDIN

Ett levande jazzmöte

Sean Nowell Quintet bjöd på högkvalitativt sväng i jazzens moderna mittfåra i ett välfyllt Café August. Bosse K Pettersson lyssnade och njöt.

MUSIK
Sean Nowell Quintet
Sean Nowell, tenorsax, Joe Abba, trummor, Fredrik Olsson, gitarr, Leo Lindberg, piano, Lars Ekman, bas, Hudiksvalls Jazzklubb på Café August, Hudiksvall.

MUSIKKVÄLL
Jazzstövande grundligger kvappast några privatföreläsningar i våra dagar. Vi får alltså vara tacksamma ett det ständigt växer från

valls tillfälligt (?) torrlagda jazzklubbs scen på ett välfyllt Café August, bjöd på högkvalitativt sväng i jazzens moderna mittfåra. Med en varierad och publiktvännlig mix av välkända evorgrens, stunsiga klassiker från hardbopens 50- och 60-tal, samt egna originalkompositioner demonstrerar Sean Nowell Quintet med all önskvärd tydlighet att stor musik klarar sig utmärkt utan stora äthöror eller rubrikskapande gimmickar.

Varken Sean Nowell eller Joe Abba är välkända af-fischnamn. Likafullt kan man ana att den stentuffa New York-konkurrensen försett dem med såväl djup som bredd, mu-

sikaliskt sett. Joe Abba varierar trumspillet med en sällsam precision, och utgör onekligen motorn i det sväng kvintetten hela tiden får till, oavsett tempo. Övrlärligt på till öppnar han några nummer med så komplexa rytmiska figurer att man förkräckt tvivlar på att han ska gå iland med dem. Vilket han förstås gör.

I Sean Nowells stora, runda ton på tenorsaxen rymmer merparten av den moderna jazzhistorien. När han i egna New York Vibe vill fånga vad det innebär att leva i hemstaden, får vi anta att det är den personliga erfarenheten som ger hans spel den samtida intäret och storstadspuls som öv-

riga solister inte riktigt förmår matcha.
I andra av kvällens höjdpunkter, bland annat en ljuvligt återhållen men omentalist Summertime och Horace Silvers läckert fingerknäppsvänliga The Cape Verdean Blues, får Fredrik Olssons pilsnabba löpningar över gitarrsträngarna, liksom Leo Lindbergs hjälpsadväckande mogna pianospel, gott om tillfällen att lyssa. Även Lars Ekman tar väl vara på solopassen på sin akustiska bas, både med stråke och utan.
Högt levande musik, utan kommersiella sidoblickar. Onekligen något att vara tacksam för.

BOSSE K PETTERSSON