



Dan McMillion Jazz Orchestra

HIGH OCTANE Sea Breeze Records, SBJ-2141; Web: www.flipcakes.com/dan_mcmillion.htm. Get it to Go; Latino Love Walk; Dancing Nightly; Danny Boy; Take the 'A' Train; Another Star; Four; Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me; A Night in Tunisia; Hey There; South 21st Street Shuffle

PERSONNEL Dan McMillion, trumpet, flugelhorn & Conn Mellophonium; Chad Shoopman, lead trumpet; Jim Derrick, John DePaola, Wayne Daughtry and Elton Reyes, trumpets; Keith Oshiro, lead trombone; Dave Stamps, Robert Harrover, trombones; Chris Lundquist, bass trombone; Tom Dietz, alto sax, flute; David Moss, tenor & soprano sax; Jennifer Mazziotti, alto sax; Dalton Hagler, baritone sax; Richard Drexler, piano; Joe Porter, bass; Glen Bush, drums; special guest: Gumbi Ortiz, latin percussion.

By Gary Alexander

We've all heard some of those official "ghost" bands - which tend to disappoint fans of the real article. Lately there has been a trend toward delivering the excitement of the original article, through what I call "resurrection" bands: 15 to 18 skilled practitioners who channel the spirit of the late-lamented leader. Such bands need not bear the name of their guiding spirit, but the resemblance is immediately audible. Dan McMillion's sharp, swinging band represents the resurrected spirit of the late Maynard Ferguson. Before he died, Ferguson loved to hear McMillion's band carry on his high-note tradition, and this CD is dedicated to the memory of Ferguson, who died last August 23, at the age of 78.

Based in Tampa, Florida, the 18-piece Dan McMillion Jazz Orchestra is admittedly larger than Ferguson's "bop nouveau" traveling band. But it is still brass-heavy, in the Ferguson tradition, featuring a total of 11 brass and only four reeds. Leader Dan McMillion takes on the Ferguson challenge, hitting the stratosphere on every cut (and he solos in 10 of 11 numbers.) This is the band's fifth CD, by my count, after *Got the Spirit, Give it One, Blown Away* (limited availability) and the previous, provocatively-titled *Up Your Brass*. The band's personnel may vary widely from CD to CD, but the key regulars lend continuity to each section and provide the best solo punch, notably Keith Oshiro on lead trombone, Chad Shoopman, lead trumpet, and Tom Dietz, lead alto.

McMillion's roaring aggregation breathes new life into several old Ferguson charts, and - like Ferguson - the band also tries to reach

younger audiences with rock-era standards. Ferguson's arrangers transformed some quality rock compositions into jazz concerti (like Jimmy Webb's "MacArthur Park" or Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Waters.") In this CD, McMillion has included Elton John's "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me" (arranged by Jay Chattaway) and Stevie Wonder's "Another Star" (by Wayne Beardwood). The most impressive chart, to me, is Wayne Beardwood's reading of "A Night in Tunisia," with special guest Gumbi Ortiz on Latin percussion, and the comical brass shakes interjected after each pre-solo ensemble. The straight-ahead swingers, like "Four" (arranged by Keith Bishop) and "Take the 'A' Train" (Don Sebesky) provide refreshing updates of Duke's theme and Miles' birth of the cool standard, respectively.

My only faint criticism is that I would like to hear just one number without a race to the stratosphere. I know that's unrealistic - like asking a NASCAR driver to slow down at Daytona - but the disc needs variety. Big bands began as an invitation to dance, and it's good to remember those roots. Let's honor the dancers - even among CD listeners - who want to whisper sweet nothings for a minute, without yelling over the brass section. Our ears and your lips need a break. There are two quiet ballads, "Danny Boy" (arranged by Don Sebesky) and a beautiful reading of "Hey There," from *Pajama Game* (arranged by Willie Maiden), but the high notes interrupt our reverie too soon (or so says my wife!)

When people ask me "Will the big bands ever return?" my answer is that they never left us. Now, most cities have at least a pick-up rehearsal band of 15+ solid professional and semi-pro musicians who feed local jazz fans regularly. In my most recent homes, there is the Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra and Richmond, Virginia's "Great American Music Ensemble," one of the leading professional repertory jazz orchestras in the nation. And Tampa has the Dan McMillion band. Long live the bands that resurrect this great music!

