The Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD

Richard Cook and Brian Morton

Seventh edition

Jed Levy (born 1958)

TENOR SAXOPHONE

Studied at New England Conservatory, then played with the Jaki Byard and Don Patterson groups. Now works in and around the New York City area.

★★★(★) Sleight Of Hand
Steeplechase SCCD 31383 *Levy; George Colligan (p); Ron McClure (b); Gerry Gibbs (d).* 11/95.

★★★(★) Round And Round
Steeplechase SCCD 31529 *Levy; Bill Gerhardt (p); Mike McGurk (b); Jeff Brillinger (d).* 3/02.

Very impressive and about as inventive a departure from the standard tenor-and-rhythm conventions as one can hope for. Levy's broad-shouldered tone and confident delivery give him the kind of full-on swing one associates with an earlier generation, but he's soaked in bebop and hard-bop practice. The superfast title-track and the closer, a recasting of the 'Cherokee' chords, show off his chops without just showing off. 'Three And Me' is an ingenious use of 3/4 and it's the setting for a quite extraordinary solo by Colligan, who takes the McCoy Tyner method to its limit here. Colligan is as imposing as Levy himself, with his playing on 'Nice And Easy' (a clever choice of standard) as humorous as it is inventive. McClure is his usual tower of strength and Gibbs is marvellously fluent and powerful. This is a great band and they change setting and pace throughout with no loss of interest: there's a bit of a dead spot in the middle with the long and uneventful 'Desert Church', but otherwise it's a first-class session.

The belated follow-up is just as good. The rhythm section aren't as well-known but they do just fine; the tunes are another largely familiar group (he even has another go at 'Cherokee'). Jed's playing, though, is again tremendous. He powers through themes and solos in a way which ought to seem bland, in terms of the steely confidence of the execution, yet it's nothing but full-throated enjoyment. The sort of record which empowers the jazz-repertory tradition without troubling to make any statements at all.