

ON THE TOWN

Levy's 'Hand': Subtle Touch

"SLEIGHT OF HAND," the latest recording by the New York-based saxophonist Jed Levy, quickly lives up to its billing. In fact, no sooner does the quartet session begin than Levy is playing tricks on our ears, executing subtle changes of key on the album's invigorating title track.

The same level of finesse Levy exhibits as a composer also helps distinguish his playing. He extracts a full, clear tone from his tenor, phrases melodies fluidly and improvises, on original pieces as well

as standards, with an appealing blend of logic and invention. For all its surprises and twists, his music never sounds forced or gimmicky.

The Frank Sinatra hit "Nice and Easy" inspires a fresh yet suitably cool reading, but the album derives most of its charm and energy from Levy's thoughtfully constructed, mood-shifting compositions and Jaki Byard's evocative blues, "Bird's Mother." A splendid example of Levy's handiwork is "Indigenous," a spirited update on the swing classic "Cherokee" and its bop cousin, "Ko Ko."



Jed Levy's finesse makes "Sleight of Hand" a welcome trick.

Adding to the album's pleasures are the alert and sometimes inspired contributions made by Levy's bandmates: bassist Ron McClure, drummer Gerry Gibbs and, in particular, pianist George Colligan.

— Mike Joyce

JED LEVY — "Sleight of Hand" (SteepleChase). The Jed Levy Quartet appears Friday and Saturday at the Nest in the Willard Hotel. ♦ To hear a free Sound Bite from this album, call Post-Haste at 202/334-9000 and press 8127. (Prince William residents, call 690-4110.)