

Kevin Harris Project – Museum Vol. 1



Credit must go where it is due. Kevin Harris is a pianist who is not merely satisfied by playing a set repertoire on the piano, an instrument he seems to make his own.

His album *Museum Vol. 1* seems to suggest that his vision is broad and his extremely musical mind is able to channel rather abstract material into artfully written charts that are capable of standing alone as well as—in this case—being strung together to form a fairly well-defined suite. It would appear that the young pianist has been awaked as a pianist and is agape at the immensity of the world with a peeled eye. Mr. Harris is also a discerning intellect and this is evident in the manner in which he mixes very intelligent choices of notes and chords with a painterly choice of colours. He is able, with this careful choice of notes and phrases, to re-envision music that has been written and played before and make it his own through personal statement and a dramatic translation of music onto a vividly imagined canvas.

Mr. Harris is possessed of a fine technique which is almost devoid of any deliberate style. Stripping down the elements of his playing in the courts of melody and harmony, Mr. Harris focuses on the vividness of tonal colour, infused with various densities of musical textures; this he imparts to notes that are precisely arranged into interesting melodies. Then Mr. Harris plays these melodies on piano and Rhodes—carefully selecting which instrument to use—in order to tell interesting stories through a moveable feast of musical visuals. These the pianist has arranged into a series of exhibits, displayed in a virtual musical museum. In anyone else's hands this might fall with a thud, becoming a failed gimmick. However, in the hands of this truly talented pianist the music not only sounds fresh and exciting, but it is also riveting. This is because Mr. Harris seems to reach into a space all his own and

pull from it a mixture of images that begin to nestle like elements in multi-dimensional objet d'art.

A "musician-painter" attracts more attention than a mere technician. This is why Mr. Harris is able to draw the visitor to his virtual museum and then present him or her with the music that certainly exists on several planes. Mr. Harris appears to mix dialects into a musical language that arises from the blues and traverses through jazz, folk and a brilliantly reincarnated bluegrass; as well as music that sounds like a brand new country music. "You are my sunshine" is one of those simple tunes that occupies a fascinating place in his museum of objects, for instance. Here the pianist begins by re-inventing the melody its beginnings as a linear melody that metamorphs into a seemingly androgynous dancing rhythmic character that is sometimes male and sometimes female. The dance continues as this exhibit hangs—in a time-space continuum—from its generic European origins through several incarnations—emerging as a shuffling bossa nova. The utter beauty of Mr. Harris' rendition of this simple song is made all the more memorable with superb soli by trumpeter Jason Palmer followed by Mr. Harris' own mesmerising one that unfurls from a one-note bass-line like a blossoming flower touched by the proverbial sun.

"The Dinosaur Suite" is a densely textured piece full of forbidding echoes of note struck with the damper on. Moreover the abrupt changes of rhythm are foretold with an exquisite arpeggio that sweeps upward and then downward to announce another mighty solo played on trumpet by Mr. Palmer. Kevin Harris' solo is superbly constructed; emerging from behind the curtain of the trumpet, Mr. Harris pushes the music in and out of dissonance and into a kind of diaphanous harmonic fabric touched by a remarkable patina recalling memories of a bittersweet interaction of characters in the musical suite. Of course there is much more material in this ever so interesting visit to *Museum Vol. 1* and it is dramatized by imagery of gorgeously turbulent harmonies in "The Nile," dense and diabolical textures in "Prince of Darkness," soaring liberation in the flights of "Redemption Song" and sweeping vistas in "Bluegrass" with its superb arco passage that introduces the piece below the floating piano melody. Mr. Harris also reveals extraordinary power in his gospel-tinged voice on the Bob Marley classic chart.

In the end this is an album that thrives on the triumph of human endeavour; his own as a pianist, extrapolated to a world of artists playing to audiences waiting to be set free.

Tracks: The Nile; Pinched Nerve; Prince of Darkness; You Are My Sunshine; The Dinosaur Suite; Bluegrass; BBBB.

Personnel: Kevin Harris: piano, Fender Rhodes, vocal; Ritchie Barshay: drums (3 – 5); Steve Langone: drums (1, 2, 7, 8); Kendall Eddy: acoustic bass; Jason Palmer: trumpet; Rick DiMuzio: tenor saxophone.

Kevin Harris Project on the Web: www.kevinharrisproject.com

Label: Independent Release

Release date: February 2013