



Mark Murphy
Midnight Mood

MPS Records (LC00979)
Distributor: Edel:Kultur (GER) /
Naxos (USA)/absolute (UK)

Vinyl UPC/EAN: 4029759124191
Vinyl Cat.-No.: 0212419MSW
Vinyl Release Date: November 10th
2017

CD UPC/EAN: 4029759124207
CD Cat.-No.: 0212420MSW
CD Release Date: November 10th
2017

www.mps-music.de

More info and artwork:

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Keywords: MPS Records, 1968, Derek Humble (Alto Saxophone), Sahib Shihab (Baritone Saxophone), Jimmy Woode (Bass), Kenny Clarke (Drums), Sahib Shihab (Flute), Francy Boland (Piano, Arranged By), Ronnie Scott (Tenor Saxophone), Ake Persson (Trombone), Jimmy Deuchar (Trumpet), audiophile 180g vinyl, CD, Download

When he died at the age of 83 in October 2015, the local papers, were restrained in their obituaries. For many jazz fans and cognoscenti, singer Mark Murphy was vastly underrated; they are right, as his prolific six-decade-long artistic career attests: during that career Murphy exhibited an inventive stylistic range that covered blues to bebop on through to modern jazz. His 1967 MPS recording lands in the middle of his "European decade", and it is one of the most beautiful, striking documents of his skills. "Midnight Mood" is characterized by the sophisticated dialogue between voice and eight musicians from the Kenny Clarke-Francy Boland-Big Band, but it begins a cappella: Murphy welcomes us with Duke Ellington's "Jump For Joy" as he walks the vocal tightrope without a net, at the same time offering us a taste of his unorthodox scat singing. With "I Don't Want Nothin'" the ensemble offers us a swinging, bluesy, mischievous miniature, while Murphy's voice on "Why And How" shifts towards a noticeably darker tinge, surrounded by short penetrating solo interludes from the band. "Alone Together" reveals a masterpiece of phrasing over syncopated piano play; "You Fascinate Me So" emphasizes Murphy's romantic ardor. "Hopeless" unfolds with overwhelming intensity à la Sinatra, and "Sconsolato" is served with a casual Hispanic flair. With subtly nuanced tenderness on "My Ship" and "I Get Along ...", Murphy evokes a depths-of-night ambience in dialogue with the keys, while "Just Give Me Time" reflects a dark sensuality that swaggers between Swing and Bossa.

MPS Releases Fall 2017

The MPS reissue series kicks off in the fall of 2017 with an attractive 'five-pack' of artists who have been central to this label; milestones, rediscoveries and new discoveries, as well as rare and much sought-after pieces are hidden within the recordings from the years 1967 through 1973, with the halcyon (golden) year 1971 smack dab in the middle. The music covers a wide range of styles and formats, ranging from piano masterpieces to vocal jazz on through to filigree guitar work.

On the album "In Tune", a cappella vocal jazz meets up with elaborate keyboard play, as Oscar Peterson joins forces with the vocal architects from Chicago, The Singers Unlimited. A refined dialogue between two musical poles unfolds in a panoply of swinging cooperation, nostalgic, dreamy moments and Brazilian excursions. This 1971 recording was The Singers Unlimited's first album for MPS, and the beginning of a fruitful partnership that had initially come about at the recommendation of Peterson himself.

The musical journey moves on from the Canadian piano giant to his Jamaican colleague, Monty Alexander, who made his MPS debut in the same year with "Here Comes The Sun". Monty steps up with his quartet (bassist Eugene Wright, percussionist Montego Joe, drummer Duff Jackson) and offers up a superb repertoire ranging from a Beatles classic to blues and Latin-hued compositions on through to bebop-flavored pieces and a rock-saturated version of Miles Davis' "So What".

Englishman John Taylor represents the third voice of piano-centered jazz. With this reissue of "Decipher", an album that has long been off the market is available once again. For years Taylor was featured as the house pianist at Ronnie Scott's, London's legendary Jazzclub. First released in 1973, the album also boasts bassist Chris Laurence and drummer Tony Levin. "Decipher" offers a deep insight into Taylor's compositional abilities; virtuoso runs, abstract tonalities with pointillist strokes, an emotive jazz waltz and a soft-spoken ballad mark the trio's diversity and Taylor's emotive world.

Likewise, fans have longed for the re-release of Volker Kriegel's "Spectrum". In a thrilling rollercoaster ride, Kriegel's second album under his own name portrays the diverse qualities of the guitarist who at that time was the enfant terrible of the German and European jazz scene. The album captures an unusually broad stylistic range, as sitar rock, folksy lyricism, and a rondo shot through with free jazz alternate, while silky-smooth guitar runs, grooving percussion, and fluorescent Electra piano lines color the nuanced sound of this 1967 album.

Vocalist Mark Murphy, who died in 2015, was voted Male Vocalist of the Year four times by Downbeat. Early on in his eventful career, he created a musical bridge between America and the Old World that he later renewed by recordings with the likes of German trumpet phenom Till Brönner. Recorded in 1967, "Midnight Mood" stood in the middle of his European decade, a brilliant moment in his long musical journey. Surrounded by eight musicians from the famed Kenny Clarke/Francy Boland Big Band, Murphy performs persuasive adaptations of Ellington, luxuriates in the grandeur of Sinatra, steps in with a nonchalant Hispanic flair, and sounds the depths of dark sensuality and romantic ardor.

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