

Garland Jeffreys **The King of In Between**

hear and be enlightened by what this clever and committed artist has to say anew.

—Robert Baird

jazz

BEN ALLISON
Action-Refraction

Ben Allison, bass; Michael Blake, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone; Steve Cardenas, Brandon Seabrook (tracks 3 & 7), guitar; Jason Lindner, Prophet 08 synthesizer, piano; Rudy Royston, drums

Palmetto PM2149 (CD). 2011. Ben Allison, prod.; Matt Balitsaris, prod., eng. DDD? TT: 42:57
Performance ★★★★★
Sonics ★★★★★

Having led the groups Medicine Wheel, Peace Pipe, Man Size Safe, and others, bassist-composer Ben Allison formed what he calls an “electro-acoustic orchestra” for *Action-Refraction*, his ninth Palmetto release. The orchestra may be small, but it’s sonically expansive, marked by continuities with as well as departures from Allison’s previous work. Extended techniques, odd instruments and timbres, the pursuit of melodies and grooves wherever they lead, regardless of genre expectations—these Allison hallmarks are well in evidence. But with one exception, the songs on *Action-Refraction* are not Allison’s own.

For his first-ever program of covers, Allison draws on everything from jazz to 20th-century classical music, from 1970s pop and soul to ’90s alt-rock. Guitarist Steve Cardenas and bass clarinetist and tenor saxophonist Michael Blake, longtime Allison cohorts, provide both grit and finely orchestrated subtlety (PJ Harvey’s “Missed” is one strong example). Rudy Royston drums with force as well as tasteful restraint,

and on two tracks Brandon Seabrook adds background guitar and feedback enhancements. But the most consistently striking elements are the piano and Prophet 08 synthesizer of Jason Lindner, a weighty jazz composer and bandleader in his own right. This is Lindner’s first appearance on a Ben Allison album, and he makes it count.

“St. Ita’s Vision,” from *Hermit Songs*, a song cycle by Samuel Barber, is a jewel of jazz surrealism in Allison’s hands, a trio feature for Lindner’s hazy-toned synth. Neil Young’s “Philadelphia,” also for trio, has poignant solos by Cardenas and the leader, framed by Royston’s simple brushwork. Thelonious Monk’s “Jackie-ing,” the opener, is something else entirely: a riot of criss-crossing textures and endless modulation so dense it’s practically a new composition.

Allison deepens that interventionist approach with the Carpenters’ “We’ve Only Just Begun” and Donny Hathaway’s “Some Day We’ll All Be Free,” adding new open-form sections and radical mood shifts. And Allison rewrites himself as well: “Broken” was first a ballad for cello titled “Andrew,” on the album *Third Eye* (1999), and later “Broke,” a mid-tempo waltz for violin and muted trumpet that appeared on *Think Free* (2009). Here Allison puts it back into 4/4, with a hypnotic tomtom beat, shred-guitar atmospherics, and surprisingly delicate counterpoint from piano and overdubbed reeds.

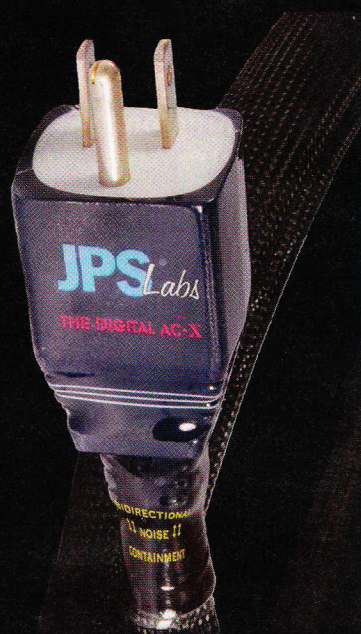
Action-Refraction was recorded at Maggie’s Farm, Palmetto’s studio in rural Pennsylvania, and the production is strong—somehow, each of these disparate, entangled voices sings with individual clarity.

—David R. Adler

GONZALO RUBALCABA
Fé / Faith

Gonzalo Rubalcaba, piano
5Passion 5P-005 (CD). 2010. Gonzalo Rubalcaba, prod.; Carlos Alvarez, Mario Garcia, engs. DDD? TT: 79:44
Performance ★★★★★
Sonics ★★★★★

An expatriate Cuban jazz pianist, Rubalcaba has always had a penchant for pensiveness, and never more so than on this solo debut album for his own 5Passion label. The dominant mood here is one of dreamy, wistful reflection broken by occasional bursts of playful exuberance. The

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