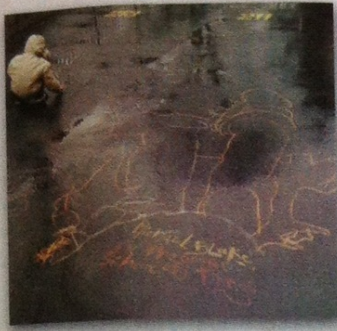


JAZZ



MICHAEL BLAKE

In the Grand Scheme of Things

Michael Blake, tenor saxophone; JP Carter, trumpet, electronics; Chris Gestrin, Fender Rhodes, Moog Micromoog synthesizer; Dylan van der Schyff, drums

Songlines SGL 1598-2 (CD). 2012. Chris Gestrin, eng., mix; Graemme Brown, mastering. DDD? TT: 72:14

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

On this outing, saxophonist Michael Blake pares down a bit the lineup from his extraordinary 2007 release, *Amor de Cosmos*. There's no bassist, yet the Micromoog bass lines of Chris Gestrin are as inventive and in-the-pocket as one could ask for. Trumpeter JP Carter brings to this music lyricism, extended technique, and even tweaky electronics (most apparent in "Freedom from Exile"), calling to mind the sonic profiles of Bill Dixon and Wadada Leo Smith. Drummer Dylan van der Schyff grooves hard in the opening "Road to Lusaka," and conjures endless percussive color in the more meditative pieces, such as "The Variety Hour" and "A View of Oblivion."

Blake has long been a mainstay of New York's progressive-jazz scene, but these players, allies from his native Vancouver, are brilliant at making acoustic and electronic sound worlds intersect. Gestrin, who recorded and mixed the date in Canada, has done a fine job of capturing the tonal idiosyncrasies of all involved. He plays Rhodes and Micromoog essentially as a single rig, balancing fat low notes, rich chords, and outright weirdness with precision and taste.

Blake's tenor sax is throaty and full of edge, but also superbly disciplined. He soars in the slow rubato of "Willie (The Lonely Cowboy)," and responds with fire to Gestrin's walking Moog bass (think Paul Chambers meets P-Funk) in the swinging "Cybermonk." As a composer, Blake manages to be both folkish and thoroughly modern ("Big Smile"), high-spirited but also a little ominous ("The Searchers"). —David R. Adler