

1. **LOCKE'S VIBE**
(INTRODUCING "I WAITED FOR YOU") 1:37
(J. Locke)
2. **I WAITED FOR YOU** 9:41
(W. Fuller / J. Gillespie) (Music Sales Corp.) ASCAP
3. **BEE VAMP** 7:17
(B. Little) (Second Floor Music) BMI
4. **SKYDIVE** 9:45
(C. Bryson / F. Hubbard) (Hubtones Music Co.) BMI
5. **TELL ME WHY** 7:12
(W. Escoffery) (Twenty-Eighth Street Music) ASCAP
6. **LOOKING AHEAD** 7:03
(B. Little) (Second Floor Music) BMI
7. **ISFAHAN** 6:26
(B. Strayhorn / E. Ellington) (Tempo Music Inc.) ASCAP
8. **MELODY FOR MELONAE** 13:31
(J. McLean) (EMI Unart Catalog) BMI



WAYNE ESCOFFERY

Veneration

Joe Locke
Hans Glawischnig
Lewis Nash

Live at Smoke

SAVANT
RECORDS INC.

SCD 2081



This vibrant recording comes at a particularly good time for Wayne Escoffery. The 32-year-old saxophonist has aimed high since moving to New York in 2000. In 2001 he became a steady member of the Mingus Big Band, and in 2006 he secured one of the most coveted gigs in jazz: a frontline position in Tom Harrell's working quintet. He's also been putting in long and fruitful hours with Ben Riley's Monk Legacy Septet, among others. These are some of the last true "apprenticeship" opportunities of our era. "I've been playing and touring a lot," Wayne says, "and I feel a lot stronger in the past year and a half." Having delivered two studio dates as a leader on the Nagel-Heyer label (*Times Change* in 2001 and *Intuition* in 2004), he felt the conditions were ripe for a live album. *Veneration* is the result. "This is me in the moment," Wayne declares. "It catches me where I'm at."

And that's an enviable place to be. Escoffery's well-developed tone, technical facility and profound musicality reflect years of intensive learning from the masters. He dedicates *Veneration* to Jackie McLean, of blessed memory, who took a keen interest in Wayne during his studies at Hartford's Hartt School of Music. Some familiar faces from Hartt, including trombonist Steve Davis and bassist Nat Reeves, showed up for the second set of this two-night run in June 2006, and their presence in the audience wasn't lost on Wayne. "They were my teachers in Hartford and we became good friends," he recalls. "When I played Jackie's 'Melody for Melonae' and I saw them there, it really touched me. I hadn't seen those guys in a long time, and Jackie had just died. That was a really special set." I'm glad to say that I was there as well.

Above all, what made it special was the virtuosity and palpable commitment of the four players on the bandstand: Escoffery, vibraphonist Joe Locke, bassist Hans Glawischnig and drummer Lewis Nash. Locke is quite simply one of jazz's most riveting performers, on any instrument. "I thought it would be nice to do this without piano," Wayne explains. "I love Joe's comping and his

vast harmonic knowledge, and there are so many different colors he can make." The renowned Lewis Nash needs no introduction; his impeccable swing feel and ear for compositional detail are well represented, and to hear him stretch in a live, open setting such as this is a distinct pleasure. His rapport with Hans Glawischnig, an emerging master of the double bass, is all but airtight. "Choosing a bass player was easy," Wayne says. "Hans is so solid and can play really straightahead or really complex. I use him every chance that I get."

On previous outings, Escoffery has made a point of showcasing his own writing. That's less of a priority on *Veneration*, which foregrounds his interpretive skill on some ageless and under-explored repertoire. Following a brief rubato introduction by Locke, Wayne transforms "I Waited for You," which once served as a closing theme for Dizzy Gillespie's big band, into a clarion opening statement. In most cases the tune has been done as a ballad—by Art Farmer, by a young Miles Davis, by the Jazz Messengers with Kenny Dorham and Hank Mobley, and most recently by Joe Lovano with Hank Jones on their 2004 Blue Note release *I'm All for You*. Escoffery reinvents it in a syncopated straight-eighth feel with a haunting progression that almost recalls "Naima." He came to the song via the album *Cool Burnin'* with the Chet Baker Quintet, a 1965 Prestige session featuring George Coleman, one of Wayne's major influences.

It is George Coleman's work with the late, lamented Booker Little that accounts for the presence here of Little's "Looking Ahead." The tune originally appeared on Little's final session for Bethlehem, *Victory and Sorrow*, reissued on CD as *Booker Little and Friend*. Little's "Bee Vamp," of course, can be found on Eric Dolphy's landmark *Live at the Five Spot* with Mal Waldron, Richard Davis and Ed Blackwell. As it happens, Wayne's association with trumpeter Don Sickler, musical director of Ben Riley's septet, gave him direct access to the Booker Little legacy. "Don owns the rights to Booker's compositions,"

notes Wayne. "So I knew he'd have the charts. I decided on 'Looking Ahead' but asked him to hip me to other cool Booker tunes. He reminded me about 'Bee Vamp' and we both thought it would sound great with vibes."

Freddie Hubbard's "Skydive" is a '70s CTI classic that originally featured Keith Jarrett on Rhodes and George Benson on guitar. Wayne's version is more in keeping with the scorching live take that appears on Hubbard's *Keystone Bop*—*Sunday Night*, with the formidable tenor/vibes pairing of Joe Henderson and Bobby Hutcherson. There is also a Joe Henderson connection to Billy Strayhorn's "Isfahan"—specifically, the swinging duo version with Christian McBride that appears on Henderson's 1992 album *Lush Life*. Ironically, Wayne hadn't been thinking of it when he planned his sparkling, seemingly effortless duet with Glawischnig. "But clearly, it was somewhere in my head," he admits.

The mournful, balladic "Tell Me Why"—the sole original on the date—came about during the past year. "My mom and my wife [vocalist Carolyn Leonhart] were both going through a hard time," Wayne says, "and I sat down at the Rhodes in my apartment and thought about those two and just wrote the tune. At first I thought about not even playing on it. I was just hearing a rhythm section with Rhodes or vibes. I thought a horn would be too heavy for the song, but then I decided the soprano would be nice, and I've been working on my soprano sound."

Appropriately, the session ends with an ambitious work by Wayne's departed mentor, Jackie McLean. "Melody for Melonae" is from 1962's *Let Freedom Ring*, and uncannily, Wayne's version winds up being almost exactly the same length as the master's. "Hopefully he felt it up there," Wayne muses. The ominous-sounding theme, a stark tone row underlined by bowed bass, practically sounds like it was written with the vibraphone in mind. The solos are raging and open-ended, but the structural recurrence of the rubato break gives the piece a sort of

Third Stream coloration. "JMac was really adamant that we gain an understanding of the tradition, the lineage of every instrument," Wayne recalls. "But once we had that, to explore further and push the envelope. I try to live by that, with one foot in the future and one in the past. All the guys on this date are like that—they're trying to look ahead and do something innovative but they're not going to leave behind swing and groove and respect for the tradition. I'm about that, and Jackie McLean was about that, and it's really come full circle in an interesting way."

—David R. Adler

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