

Stockton Helbing *Patina*



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Perhaps in jazz most of all, things have a way of falling into place. In April 2014, the Dallas Museum of Art approached Stockton Helbing to compose a suite in honor of modernist jewelry artist Arthur Smith. During his research Helbing learned that Smith maintained a small shop for over 30 years on West 4th Street, in New York's West Village. Just a block away at the Blue Note on West 3rd, Helbing had gained formative experience playing with the late trumpeter and big band leader Maynard Ferguson. Though the Museum didn't exactly foresee it, Helbing was just the guy to portray Smith's artistic backyard through the medium of music. The result is *On West 4th Street*, the five-movement suite that forms the centerpiece of *Patina*, Helbing's sixth album as a leader.

In addition to the suite, there are four more Helbing originals, three of which — "Cool Man Jack," "Crazy Aquarius" and "Handprints" — have appeared on previous albums. The big difference here is the chordless setting, a choice Helbing made partly out of necessity: the venue where he premiered the suite did not have a piano.

There was another twist as well: the Museum commissioned the Dallas Black Dance Theater to choreograph original dances for three of Helbing's movements ("Copper," "Patina" and "On West 4th Street"). The challenges only grew, in fact: the dance movements were supposed to have no improvisatory element. "They gave me very specific timings, specific tempos, specific lengths, and no improvisation. There were all these crazy moving parts. Right off the bat this made it sound really different than my previous projects."

But different as it is, *Patina* is anchored by the presence of bassist James Driscoll and tenor saxophonist David Lown, both North Texas alums who've appeared on several of Helbing's previous outings. Lown appears only on the four non-suite tracks, pairing up with fellow tenor Shelley Carrol in a dialogue full of depth and swing. Carrol takes center stage on the suite, playing with fire and authority in a highly exposed trio mode.

Revisiting one's earlier pieces is something that sits firmly within the tradition, as Helbing notes of his youthful pursuit of different Dizzy Gillespie versions of "Night in Tunisia." "Both James and David, they've played these tunes with me a lot, but Shelley had never played them," he says. "It was really fun to see where they went. If I remember correctly they're all first takes. It was a musical chemistry experiment to insert a musician as great as Shelley into the mix of the three of us, who have a lot of mileage together. They went places they'd never gone before."

- David Adler



Track Listing:

1. Turtle Tank Blues (3:58)
2. Cool Man Jack (5:57)
3. On West 4th Street Suite:
3. Movement I: Copper (6:05)
4. Movement II: Silver (3:00)
5. Movement III: Patina (5:39)
6. Movement IV: Gold (4:04)
7. Movement V: On West 4th Street (5:34)
8. Handprints (5:54)
9. Crazy Aquarius (4:48)

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