

L.A. Jazz Scene

March 2007, Issue No. 234

CJSQuintet

Let's Play

(ConceptSound)

Following in the tracks of their superb 2003 release, *An Affair of the Art*, the CJSQuintet brings a program of originals and standards to us for their latest album: classic jazz and bebop that turns up the heat and won't let go. Saxophonist Chuck Johnson, trumpeter James Smith, pianist Al Daniels, bassist Wendell Williams and drummer Anthony Davis interpret with a fluid consistency that proves cohesive and comes from deep within.

"Let's Play" rocks with a light, soprano saxophone thrill as the band explores its melody with a relaxed air. Daniels' electric piano moves with a contemporary texture that keeps things light and carefree. Johnson's tenor gives "Star Eyes" a lovely texture, as acoustic piano and double bass glide softly on padded footfalls. Here, the quintet enjoys a serene moment to reflect before launching their arrangement with aplomb. The change-up brings everyone together in a cohesive affair that warms the heart.

Johnson's original samba, "Buster's Dance," moves the CJSQ into a celebratory mood, while Tommy Turpentine's "You Said It" turns up the heat with a burning bebop classic. The latter features Smith's open trumpet and Johnson's full-toned tenor in a romping adventure. Appropriately, the high point of the album is named "Subtle Intensity." It brings the band together in a delightful, blues-based sojourn that burns without going over the top. Each member of the CJSQ steps up to the plate and delivers a lovely interpretation that lasts. These five gentlemen bring a genuine love into their work, and it shows.

Jim Santella