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Fathead: Ray Charles Presents David Fathead Newman – Speakers Corner

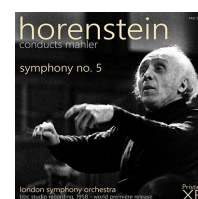
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by Audiophile Audition | Jul 16, 2019 | Jazz CD Reviews, SACD & Other Hi-Res Reviews | 0 comments

Fathead: Ray Charles Presents David Fathead Newman – Atlantic Records 1304 (1960)/Speakers Corner (2019) 180-gram stereo vinyl, 37:09 **1/2:**



Pristine Classical



Harmonia Mundi



Pure Pleasure / Speakers Corner



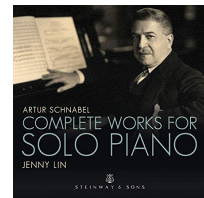
Steinway and Sons

(David Newman – alto saxophone, tenor saxophone;
Ray Charles – piano;; Bennie Crawford – baritone
saxophone; Marcus Belgrave – trumpet; Edgar Willis
– double bass; Milton Turner – drums)

Atlantic Records revolutionized the music industry. Among the many achievements of the label was producing soul, jazz and r & b acts. By 1958, they were the second largest jazz label with acts like John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, Les McCann and Herbie Mann. But Atlantic was instrumental in combining jazz with rhythm and blues. Perhaps the greatest purveyor of this genre was Ray Charles. Texan saxophonist David “Fathead” Newman was influenced by jump blues (Louis Jordan). He teamed with Charles in 1951 and became a staple of the orchestra. His 8 and 12-bar solos (“Lonely Town”, “Swanee River Rock”, “The Right Time” and “Unchain My Heart”) became synonymous with Charles’ Atlantic sound. Newman’s instinctive chops would elevate him beyond the status of sideman and soloist. Over his career, he recorded 38 albums as a bandleader. He scored films and did session work for a veritable “who’s who” of jazz, r & b, rock and pop artists.

Speakers Corner has released a re-mastered 180-gram vinyl of Newman’s debut album. *Ray Charles Presents Fathead Newman* is stellar with an all-star group of musicians (Ray Charles/piano; Bennie Crawford/baritone saxophone; Marcus Belgrave/trumpet; Edgar Willis/double bass; Milton Turner/drums) that provides 37 minutes of soulful jazz exuberance. Engineered by stereo pioneer Tom Dowd, this is Atlantic fidelity at its finest. Side One opens with Paul Mitchell’s “Hard Times” as pianist Ray Charles’ bluesy intro leads into the easy swing of this Bennie Crawford arrangement. Newman leads on alto with a saucy vamp and takes the first solo with soulful articulation. Charles is eloquent on piano with expressive right hand notation. Marcus Belgrave adds some flair on trumpet before the ensemble returns. Crawford (who arranged six of the eight tracks) embraces a larger Cannonball Adderley “Work Song” vibe on “Weird Beard”. In succession, Newman (on tenor) and Crawford distill the muscular, “blue soul” essence of jazz. Belgrave contributes a pointed run before Charles lays down some precise riffs that are reminiscent of Count Basie phasing. After a very brief stride piano, Newman delivers a poignant late-night moody alto sax on “Willow Weep For Me”. His use of vibrato is compelling. Belgrave follows with flowing agility as Charles takes over the chorus. The sextet picks it up considerably on the jump swing opus, “Bill For Bennie”. The staccato dynamics include saxophone/trumpet counterpoint and a ravishing solo by Crawford.

Side Two easily maintains the artistic momentum. A unison lead kicks



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off "Sweet Eyes" (a third Crawford song). This jam is more jump/jazz and Newman just swings on tenor. Crawford and Belgrave add grit to their solos and Brother Ray excels on a bop-like piano run. "Fathead" (written and arranged by Newman) is a walk on the wilder side of r & b jazz. Drummer Milton Turner owns the crisp tempo breaks staying in lockstep with double bassist Edgar Willis. Charles stretches out on his solo, but like the other soloists, mangos to operate in the overall group context. It would be nice to hear him in a trio setting. "Mean To Me" has been a slower, emotional torch song, but Charles' arrangement is up tempo. Fathead glides along on alto with tonal fluidity. Belgrave's run is snappy and rhythmic, while Crawford deepens the atmosphere with low-end baritone sax. Charles' solo coyly touches on "Makin' Whoopie". The finale "Tin Tin Deo" is a Latin groove fest with Charles and Turner carving out a fiendishly, hypnotic beat.

Speakers Corner has done a masterful job in re-mastering *Fathead: Ray Charles Presents David Fathead Newman* to audiophile vinyl. The stereo separation is flawless with saxes and trumpet on left speaker and the rhythm section on the right. Baritone and tenor saxophone are captured with thickness and the alto's elasticity is pushed, but never shrill. The liner notes are incisive and there is a plethora of technical recording data.

TrackList:

Side One:

Hard Times
Weird Beard
Willow Weep For Me
Bill For Bennie

Side Two:

Sweet Eyes
Fathead
Mean To Me
Tin Tin Deo

—Robbie Gerson

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