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ART FARMER QUARTET FEATURING JIM HALL- Live At The Half Note

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Art Farmer (flh); Jim Hall (elg); Steve Swallow (b); Walter Perkins (d), Recorded at Half Note NYC 1963

The partnership between Farmer and Hall produced a special kind of magic that is brought into sharp focus on this live session. Both were gentle melodists that functioned best in the middle range of their instruments and both were individualists with distinctive sounds on their horns. They rarely, if ever, played in an aggressive, hard bop mode but managed to play in that style in a personal, laid back manner. This set at the Five Spot Café catches the band on top form spinning out a swinging Stompin' At The Savoy where both take long, inventive solos and the rhythm section whisk them along effortlessly. Swing Spring, the early modal line by Miles Davis is taken at a fast clip but effectively with Farmer on top form and Hall not far behind him. Drummer Perkins gets a good workout near the end of this selection where he utilizes the full range of his instrument.

What's New is the ballad feature where both front liners get to deliver warm, lyrical statements. I Want To Be Happy is another up-tempo romp, played with verve by all and the longest track at over twelve minutes duration. I'm Getting Sentimental is given over entirely to Hall, the only soloist and he makes the most of it with sympathetic interjections by Perkins and smooth bass from Swallow. Occasionally these two lay out and leave Hall to improvise alone, which he does effectively. Swallow's firm, swinging bass lines are a great asset and some of us were sorry when he changed to electric bass and almost disappeared from the mainstream jazz scene a short time later. Perkins was never loud or obtrusive but, like Swallow, proved an ideal drummer for this band. When Farmer and Hall linked up again in 1978 to record Big Blues for CTI they proved that the magic was still there. On that occasion they added vibes to the front line.

The Speakers Corner reproduction in 180- gram premium vinyl, brings out all the highs and lows of this stellar session. So much so that the noisy audience can be heard clearly at times, talking during solos. Why do they do that?

Reviewed by Derek Ansell

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