

SINGLE REED EXPRESSIONS VOL 4

Ronald L Caravan (clarinet,
saxophones), Sar-Shalom
Strong (piano)
Mark Records

Ronald L Caravan's dedication to the recording of both standard and more obscure repertoire is clearly demonstrated in his eight-album series *Single Reed Expressions*. This particular disc, Volume 4, offers much variety, from a Brahms clarinet sonata and 'Meditation' from Massenet's *Thais* through to two of Caravan's own compositions and works by Corigliano, Mácha and Koch. It is unusual to come across a performer performing as a soloist on both clarinet and saxophone, and across the disc Caravan displays his admirable technique on soprano and alto saxophones as well as clarinet. Overall, the disc is an attractive collection of works that would happily take its place in any single-reed player's collection.

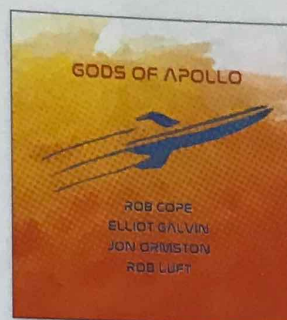
The disc opens with a fine rendition of the Brahms Sonata in E flat, demonstrating some attractive clarinet playing with a rich, warm sound and excellent interplay between Caravan and pianist Sar-Shalom Strong. While this is unlikely to take the place of a definitive recording of this work in a music collection, it is certainly a worthy addition. The other clarinet offerings include James Corigliano's *Clarinet Caprice* – a rather charming piece, whose character Caravan successfully captures – and Caravan's own work, *Recitation* – by far the most contemporary of the clarinet works offered, making extensive use of quarter tones and other extended techniques. It is an interesting addition to the repertoire and delivered with much skill.

I find Caravan much more persuasive on clarinet than on saxophone. (This may reflect my taste in saxophone tone.) In 'Meditation' from *Thais* (Massenet), I find his soprano saxophone vibrato somewhat excessive, and the intonation – particularly in the higher register – rather insecure. I would be unlikely to give this track a second listen; for me, it lets down the rest of the album somewhat. However, Caravan obviously has a fine technique on the instrument, demonstrated in his own *Fantasy Piece* – a rather fun solo in which he shows off a hugely impressive control of the altissimo register on the soprano.

The rest of the album is given over to three works for alto saxophone. While I still prefer a saxophone sound with a little less vibrato than Caravan applies, I do prefer his alto to his soprano sound, and it is steeped in the American tradition. Much like the light-hearted *Clarinet Caprice*, Corigliano's *Serenade and Rondo* is a rather charming piece that certainly could have its place in a recital programme. The final two pieces, by Otmar Mácha and Erland von Koch, are a little more contemporary in style, but certainly not difficult to listen to, showcasing Caravan's impressive technique and exemplary altissimo register.

Overall, this disc represents a pleasant and varied collection of single-reed repertoire. While there are a few indiscretions of intonation, and the saxophone sound is not quite to my taste, one cannot dispute Caravan's impressive technique on both instruments. His contribution of eight albums of saxophone and clarinet repertoire, all of which can be found on Spotify, should certainly be commended.

Alastair Penman



GODS OF APOLLO
Rob Cope (saxophone)
Ubuntu Music

Rob Cope will be familiar to some readers as a host of The Jazz Podcast, or possibly through his work with Andy Scott's Group S, Phil Meadows' Engines Orchestra, or his directorial debut on his recent film *Richard Turner: A Life in Music*. *Gods of Apollo* marks Cope's first solo album, with the (inter-)stellar line-up of Elliot Galvin (piano), Rob Luft (guitar) and Jon Ormston (percussion).

The album was born out of Cope's fascination with space travel. It traces the space race between the Soviet Union and the United States, from the first manmade satellites in 1957 through to the final moon landing in 1972. The disc features archive recordings from this period, ranging from the unmistakable blips of Sputnik through to recordings from NASA's mission control, and ultimately setting foot on the moon. The archive recordings are presented chronologically, forming a backdrop over which the musicians improvise. Having the archive audio presented in this way gives the album a film-score feel, with each track representing a different scene.

The level of musicianship on the album is second to none, with the artists complementing each other masterfully and interacting seamlessly with the archive material. Having such a strong concept behind the album helps to give it real coherence, and unlike much of today's music, it really is best enjoyed as an entire album rather than as individual tracks. The recording has been a long time in the making, and it's no accident that its release coincides with the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing.

While the musicians on the disc are predominantly from a jazz background, the music is probably best described as 'contemporary' with wide-ranging influences, and I would almost describe it as a soundscape. Some might find some of the material a little challenging on the first hearing, but there is no denying the strong concept and consummate musicianship, which provide plenty of rewards for the discerning listener. I should also add that the sound quality and mixing of the album are excellent, which really helps to glue it all together. On Cope's website, the album is described as 'an adventure not to be missed.' I would add that it's one you won't regret taking!

Alastair Penman