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Tara Davidson's View

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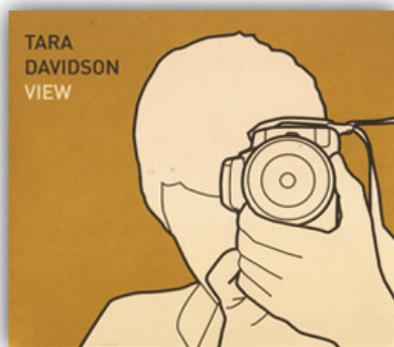
TARA DAVIDSON'S VIEW

REVIEWING TARA DAVIDSON'S LATEST RELEASE SINCE THE 2008 JUNO NOMINATED *CODE BREAKING*

TARA DAVIDSON (ALTO SAX), JAMIE REYNOLDS (PIANO/RHODES), JON MAHARAJ (BASS), FABIO RAGNELLI (DRUMS), AND FEATURING TREVOR HOGG (TENOR SAX)

Within the first few seconds of listening to this record, it becomes apparent why in her biography, alto saxophonist **Tara Davidson** quotes Mike Murley as a very strong musical influence. And although we can all relate to having great influential teachers in our lives, few of us can actually say we've had the pleasure to share the stage, play on records, and tour with our musical heroes. Over the past few years, Tara Davidson has spent most of her time playing concerts and tours with *DMBQ*, the *Mike Murley Septet*, as well as the *Paul Read Orchestra*, the *Andy Ballantyne Large Ensemble*, and her own group among many others.

Compared to her 2008 Juno nominated release, *Code Breaking*, Tara Davidson totally revamps the group dynamic by choosing to collaborate with a totally brand new cast of musicians: **Jamie Reynolds** (piano & rhodes), **Jon Maharaj** (bass) and **Fabio Ragnell** (drums), with **Trevor Hogg** (tenor sax) on a few of the compositions. Although the new lineup is a welcome change, the tunes and playing are not a far shot from Tara's previous work with *DMBQ* and her own group. The familiar feel and sound of the first tune (which serves as a good introduction to the works to come) embodies the style we've heard before on Murley, Braid and *DMBQ* recordings, while the fourth track, "*Murphy's Law*", completes the picture with Jamie Reynolds on Fender Rhodes achieving a striking resemblance to David Braid on Kelly Jefferson's "*Everything Is Beautiful*" from the 2011 Juno nominated, *Next Exit*.



One thing that becomes apparent from the start is the unstoppable Ragnelli-Maharaj machine, which seems to lay the foundation for the rest of the playing to really unfold. Ragnelli graces each tune with the most solid grooves known to mankind and a tasteful wash of cymbal splashes, while Maharaj is sure to inspire as both a rhythm section member and soloist. It is likely difficult to play anything that sounds bad over this rhythm section – they totally have your back.

With just seven tunes, the record manages to display Davidson's wide compositional and playing range. Each tune has something different to offer the listener, and Tara makes great use of Trevor Hogg's tenor and Jamie Reynold's Rhodes to get even more diversity between the tunes. From poppy anthems (*Bunny, Bubs and Bodie, For Glenda*), to more traditional slow tempos (*Marni's Way*), to Latin-influenced straight grooves (*Guillermo's Song*), the record keeps you wondering what's next, often with a pleasant surprise always just around the corner.

The sixth tune, “*South Western View*“, was my personal favourite, perhaps because it brought back a sense of nostalgia, reminding me of something out of a Weather Report tune – although I can’t exactly say what. Again, the switch to flute for the head in this tune works wonders to make this composition unique from the rest. Complete with ever-fashionable piano–bass unison riffs in seven, Tara uses this opportunity to stretch out and showcase an alternate side to the melodic approach of the previous tunes.

Another aesthetic to the record definitely worth mentioning is the attractive cover art – which on the Toronto jazz scene right now is surprisingly hard to come by. Credited to Yesim Tosuner of *Backyard Design*, the artwork may seem familiar, sharing the same concept used by Andrew Downing and Lina Allemano on recent releases. Altogether a fantastic example of a great unifying concept and calculated simplicity, working alongside the music, making it a pleasure for fans to pick up the physical record. There’s nothing that spoils great tunes and fantastic playing like an awful album cover, and it’s great to see that *View* is not one of those.

Altogether, Tara Davidson’s *View* is a very enjoyable collection of beautiful and varied pieces of music, played by a cast of fresh faces. Even though the record does not attempt to break new ground in modern jazz, it confidently stands on its own as an honest and very successful effort following in the footsteps of Canadian greats such as Mike Murley and David Braid. I would not be surprised to see *View* join *Code Breaking* as a nominee for next year’s Junos.

If you liked *Code Breaking* and *DMBQ*, you’re going to love this record!

Highlights: **South Western View & Bunny, Bubs and Bodie**

Learn more about Tara Davidson at: www.taradavidson.ca

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