

Look for the Silver Lining. Performers: Phil Dwyer, tenor saxophone; Don Thompson, piano. Toronto: Triplet Records, 2013. 1 compact disc (62:07). Contents: *If I Were a Bell* (6:18) – *Guess I'll Hang My Tears Out to Dry* (8:05) – *Just You, Just Me* (6:11) – *Autumn Nocturne* (6:04) – *How About You?* (5:21) – *What's New* (8:56) – *You and the Night and the Music* (6:01) – *I'll Be Around* (5:19) – *Touch of Your Lips* (4:47) – *Au Privave* (5:47).

Look for the Silver Lining is the last album that Phil Dwyer recorded before turning his attention this past fall to becoming an attorney. It marks a watershed for Dwyer as he embarks on a new career following his move back to the West Coast in 2008 to reclaim his sobriety. The album, which came together rather spontaneously with his friend and mentor, Don Thompson, is dedicated to the people (including his AA sponsor) who have helped Dwyer to navigate the challenges he has faced.

The overall effect is of a pleasing casualness that perhaps shows another side, or sides, of Dwyer's art. This reviewer has usually observed Dwyer's playing to be bombastic and aggressively technical, which makes for exciting listening but can leave one wishing for more musical or more sensitive expressions. With this outing we get to hear all of these things in abundance supported by the incomparable Don Thompson, a legend of the Canadian jazz scene.

Playing a monophonic instrument with piano in a jazz setting can be daunting. There are none of the rhythmic safety nets that bass and drum provide, and there is less support in the building and release of tension throughout the arcs of each song. In the end, there is just the stark ability to paint with the song's harmonies and drive the rhythm forward with an innate sense of time. To do this well requires tremendous and virtuosic musicality.

This album is comprised of standards. This choice makes good sense because the players want to be as comfortable as possible and the American Songbook is ample fodder for easy conversation.

It begins in spry fashion with "If I Were a Bell" done at a mid-tempo and swinging out of the gate. Once the melody is complete, however, Dwyer launches into his solo and we are immediately faced with his virtuosity - or is it verbosity? It can be difficult to differentiate the two, musically speaking, as there is a fine line between dazzling and pedantic. The price of an inundation of technique is a loss of musical expression, and this reviewer was unsure at this point whether the duo was going to take the dazzling or pedantic route. Fortunately, after Dwyer's solo, Thompson comes in and plays a solo firmly rooted in the bebop style, which helps bring stability.

The next song is a classic tenor ballad called “Guess I’ll Hang My Tears Out to Dry,” one of the best known versions of which Dexter Gordon recorded on his album, *Go!* Here is where we catch a glimpse of how sublime these two musicians can sound together. Whereas the first track seemed disjointed, the second track shows these masters flexing their lyrical muscles. The piano intro begins by hinting at another torch song, “Misty,” and the saxophone just slips into the melody with some minor embellishment. The saxophone’s sparse statement is perfectly accompanied by the piano. Lush voicings are on grand display and the entire introduction and melody float toward the first solo taken by the piano, which continues the floating sensation. This is followed by a beautiful tenor solo that skips in and out of double time throughout the two A sections of this AABA form. Dwyer’s solo on the bridge uses cascading arpeggios to great effect until he decides to come back to the melody on the last A section. This is an unusual treatment of the form because, while it’s common to only use part of the third chorus of a ballad for improvisation, the melody is normally played through the bridge and the last A section. In this case the bridge is improvised over as well. It is a gorgeous treatment of the song.

Many of the other songs on the album follow a similar pattern of a lush soundscape that segues into frenetic energy, the effect of which is comforting but predictable. Until, that is, “You and the Night and the Music.” Here we enter territory that is not often mined in modern jazz. The snaking, twisting lines of eighth notes, where the downbeat is displaced across bar lines, evoke the sinuous style of Lennie Tristano and his disciples Warne Marsh and Lee Konitz. It really is a startling change after hearing the first six tracks, and it is wonderful to behold. That these musicians can slip so easily into this style speaks to their mastery of the jazz lexicon. The artistry lies in the display of intimacy one would expect to hear in a ballad, which moves into an up-tempo song that sustains over six minutes. This track is the highlight of the album.

Look for the Silver Lining is a fine homage to some of the important people in Dwyer’s life as he moves on to the next phase. I highly recommend it as a showcase of the jazz talent this country has to offer.

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