

PETER HUM Ottawa Citizen review

Captain Awesome (Chronograph Records) Ben Henriques



Hopefully, Vancouver saxophonist Ben Henriques has many fond memories of the dozen years that he spent in Montreal. At the very least, you could say that the 30-year-old hornman left town with a bang — namely his vibrant new disc *Captain Awesome*.

Before he left Montreal, where he earned two music degrees at McGill University, Henriques recorded his second CD with a crew of slightly older players that included pianist Josh Rager, guitarist Kenny Bibace, bassist Fraser Hollins and drummer Dave Laing.

They handle Henriques' eight originals with great aplomb — and the full-toned, fluent Henriques is no slouch, either.

The title track is a charger. Here's a live version of it from a few years ago, featuring Henriques with a different rhythm section.

No offence to the fine players in the clip, but the CD version with bigger and punchier from the get-go, and then bolstered by Laing's backbeat-y playing once solo time rolls around. As for Henriques' tenor playing, there are moments when it makes me think that he's a fan of Joshua Redman's direct, inflected, long-lined approach.

In a similar upbeat, swinging vein is the punchy tune *Sweet Lovely*. More dark is *Fortress of Solitude*, which mixes pedal-point and change-making pursuits. There's something about the tune's overall sectioning that makes it feel a little chunky to me, but in that regard, it's an exception.

More than a few tracks have broad lyrical streaks. *Soulianis and Rahm* is a ballad duet for piano tenor. In spite of its ominous title, *Paranoia Is A Flower* is a slow, pretty waltz. The lilting contemporary tune *Cloud City* is one of my favourites on the disc. Here's a taste of what it sounds like:

Henriques twins his soprano saxophone with Bibace's guitar on the twisting, insistent tune *Marshland* and the pretty, disc-closing *Beneath My Smile*. That patient, satisfying track is one of the disc's richest, with a beguiling guitar and arco introduction, a potent solo by Hollins, and a poised solo by Henriques that crests nicely.