



The Bill Allred Classic Jazz Band

BILL ALLRED'S CLASSIC JAZZ BAND: THE CLASSIC SWING COLLECTION (Sunjazz CD 0065) 75:07 min.

Bugle Call Rag; A String of Pearls; She's Just My Size; What's New?; I've Got the World On A String; Cherokee; The Man With the Horn - Melancholy Rhapsody; Relaxin'; I'm Shoutin' Again; Begin the Beguine; The Pink Panther; Harlem Nocturne; Air Mail Special; In the Mood; Satin Doll; Black Coffee; Chattanooga Choo Choo; Them There Eyes

Reviewed by Michael Steinman

Today, many fraudulent versions of Swing are marketed as if they were microwaveable commodities, recognizable fragments of musical Americana. Think of the last time you heard a wedding duo, perhaps electric piano and Fender bass, labor through a disco version of "Pennsylvania 6-5000," vainly trying to get grandparents on the dance floor. Recall those weirdly named ensembles ("Big Bad Voodoo Something-or-Other" and its peers) that sprang up some years ago, purveying clangorous, unsubtle music that owed a good deal to Bill Haley and his Comets, far too little to Basie, Henderson, or Ellington.

Happily, Bill Allred's Classic Jazz Band offers the real thing on its accurately titled disc. *The Classic Swing Collection* is a sampler drawn from seven previous issues. Allred writes, "Here is a collection of some of the swingiest and most requested big band tunes that we have recorded between 1989 and 2002."

Through clever arranging, the Classic Jazz Band doesn't need 16 or 17 musicians to sound convincingly full-bodied — voicing the trombones with the one reed to sound like a section, for instance. Ask someone musically knowledgeable to count the musicians he or she hears on any selection, and only someone who knows Allred's ensemble intimately will say "Eight."

This well-balanced and well-rehearsed octet is full of glorious soloists: Bill Allred and his son John form a trombone section worthy of McGarity and Cutshall, of Jay and Kai; the two trumpets, Charlie Bertini and Bobby Packwood, can play

ballads soulfully or shout for joy brilliantly in the upper register. Terry Myers is a gifted reed section all on his own — and he avoids Benny Goodman licks. The rhythm sections (pianists Al Stevens, Bill Hunter, Randy Morris, Jeff Phillips; bassists Jay Mueller or Lou Mauro; drummer Warren Sauer) coalesce for loose, forceful Swing playing, and they solo without clichés. The Classic Jazz Band is contemporary; the soloists do not copy Krupa or James, and the arrangements are limber, full of surprises. However, it's all in the idiom, so no one turns "A String of Pearls" into an opportunity to do his Freddie Hubbard imitation. And, thankfully, there are no vocals, well-meant or otherwise!

The repertoire should get all the dancers on the floor, not only those aged enough to remember the pre-compact disc world. Since Swing is so closely identified with a particular repertoire — songs that embody our collective memories of Goodman and Miller, of Barnet and Basie — a Swing compact disc that didn't do homage to everyone's heroes would seem inadequate. But *The Classic Swing Collection* does not define itself as nostalgia, so it offers Henry Mancini and New Testament Basie side by side with the hits of 1935-1945.

The presentation here is expert: the analog originals have been digitally remastered to produce a sound that is clear but not over-defined. Future issues might provide some identification of soloists, however. A band with a five-horn front line might not need this, but some new listeners might not be able to figure out the trombone and trumpet solos.

In his notes, Bill Allred says that the band has recorded more Swing classics than could fit on one compact disc: bring on Volume Two! (Note to Sunjazz's Marketing Division: insert coupons for suitable snacks and drinks into the next release, and promote it, accurately, as "Swing Dance Party in a Box!") For information about the band or to order this compact disc online, visit the Classic Jazz Band's website at <http://www.billallred.com/>. Or contact SunJazz Records, 653 Rosemere Circle, Orlando, FL 32835. Phone/fax (5407) 293-8212. Price is \$15 plus \$1.50 for shipping.

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