



Steve Davis *Think Ahead*

SMOKE SESSIONS

★★★★½

For trombonist Steve Davis, thinking about the future surely involves a bit of controlled aggression—or at the very least, confrontation. The opening notes of *Think Ahead*, Davis' 19th album as a leader and his first release since 2015's *Say When*, form a driving, almost pug-nacious melody. Taken by itself, the riff on the Tony Williams tune "Warrior," backed by a pounded piano downbeat and a driving swing, sets a theme of antagonism. But Davis' first solo

Somi *Petite Afrique*

OKEH 88875191262

★★★★½

Somi models herself after such compelling storytellers as Nina Simone, Abbey Lincoln and Oscar Brown Jr. Her yarns often draw upon personal experiences as a first-generation African American of Ugandan and Rwandan parents. Most of the time, her phenomenal singing chops take a backseat to epigrammatic verses that evoke rich images and poignant narratives. Sometimes, though, the conceit of her original compositions proves more beguiling than the actual content.

That said, *Petite Afrique* is Somi's best effort yet. Using Harlem's shifting African diaspora ecosystem as the setting, Somi explores various issues such as gentrification, cultural displacement, identity politics, police brutality and immigration, topped off with lots to do about coffee, tea and blackness. Whether she's embodying a solemn African immigrant strolling through Harlem ("Alien"), lamenting the crumbling consequences of gentrification ("The Gentry") or grieving an arranged marriage while longing for her true love ("BLUE"), Somi's poised, phantasmagoric vocals cast spells over the evocative arrangements, yielding the same

turn—showcasing his sweet, melodic tone—adds a caveat to that message. He steps away from that forward momentum ever so slightly, laying back in the pocket instead of standing on top of the beat.

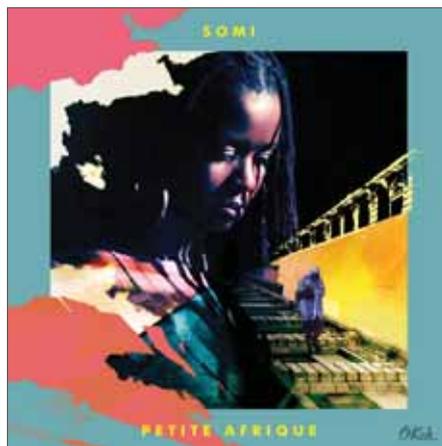
Davis has peppered the release with a wide variety of styles, but the level of heat presented on "Warrior" dissipates as the album progresses. It's a personal album, and he has gathered an outstanding array of sidemen for the date. These musicians blend perfectly as an ensemble, but also bring interesting solo ideas to the record. With a horn-heavy front line that includes alto saxophonist Steve Wilson and tenor saxophonist Jimmy Greene, Davis is able to probe expansive harmonies, creating a deep richness to every tune. The rhythm section, anchored by pianist Larry Willis, follows Davis in lock-step from uptempo bebop numbers to introverted ballad tunes to quasi-sidewinding funk.

Taken as a whole, "hope" might be a more apt message for Davis' tunes. "Mountaintop" contains a similar plea as "Warrior," but the title track characterizes Davis' outlook as more reasoned objection than frenzied dissent. —Jon Ross

Think Ahead: Warrior; Abena's Gaze; A Little Understanding; Atmosphere; Mountaintop; Polka Dots And Moonbeams; Love Walked In; Think Ahead; Little B's Poem; Evening Shades Of Blue; Farewell, Brother. (75:28)

Personnel: Steve Davis, trombone; Steve Wilson, alto saxophone; Jimmy Greene, tenor saxophone; Larry Willis, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Lewis Nash, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com



mesmeric sensations of Julie Dash's 1991 movie, *Daughters of the Dust*. And like that movie, the meditative nature of *Petite Afrique* may take more than a few spins to firmly lodge in both mind and heart. But once it does, it'll surely haunt. —John Murph

Petite Afrique: Disappearing Act I; Alien; Black Enough; The Wild One; They're Like Ghosts; The Gentry; Kadiatou The Beautiful; Holy Room; Disappearing Act II; Let Me; BLUE; Go Back To Your Country (Interlude); Like Dakar; Midnight Angels. (53:00)

Personnel: Somi, vocals; Liberty Elman, guitar; Nate Smith, drums; Keith Witty, bass, percussion, keyboards (3); Marika Hughes, cello (2, 5, 7); Toru Dodo, piano; Michael Olatuja, bass; Etienne Charles, trumpet (3, 6, 10, 13), percussion (10), Rhodes (14); Marcus Strickland, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet (3, 6, 13); Jaleel Shaw, alto saxophone (3, 6, 13); Jessica Troy, viola (5, 7); Dana Lyn, Mazz Swift, violins (5, 7); Aloe Blacc, vocals (6).

Ordering info: okeh-records.com



John Patitucci *Irmão De Fé*

NEWELLE RECORDS 007

★★★★

Lester Young believed it was important for an instrumentalist to know the lyrics to a tune in order to create the right mood when playing it. But what about the listener's responsibility? Though there are no vocals on John Patitucci's Brazilian-themed *Irmão De Fé*, the LP's sleeve notes (by co-producer Elan Mehler) includes translations of the lyrics to two of the nine songs, to ensure that the listener has a deeper sense of what the players are trying to express.

Focussing on the song, as opposed to the improvisational possibilities it might present, often leads to bland jazz—but not here. Instead, by emphasizing the emotional content of the material, Patitucci and company work out a balance between interpretation and improvisation that does the songs justice while still leaving plenty of room to play.

It helps that Patitucci, guitarist Yotam Silberstein and percussionist Rogério Boccato have chops to spare. "Desvairada" finds Patitucci's double bass and Silberstein's guitar skittering effortlessly through unison lines in a brisk 6/8, while "Nilopolitano" pivots deftly between the boppish 16ths of the melody and the trio's funky jamming. But their virtuosity isn't all flash, as one of the album's most technically impressive performances, "Olha Maria," makes its point through a simple arco statement of the melody.

Audiophiles will thrill at the vividness of the analog sound here, especially the rich depth of Patitucci's six-string bass on "Sinhá." But Newelle's devotion to the LP does have one drawback: It's hard to imagine anyone listening to this music and not wishing there was room for more.

—J.D. Considine

Irmão De Fé: Irmão De Fé; Catavento; Pr'um Samba; Desvairada; Olha Maria; Samba Do Grande Amor; As Vitruines; Nilopolitano; Sinhá. (38:34)

Personnel: John Patitucci, double bass, electric bass; Yotam Silberstein, guitar; Rogério Boccato, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: newelle-records.com