



## Celebrating “The Jazz Life” with Bradford Hayes

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Sometimes it seems that every young musician wants to play the saxophone. One of the newest additions to classical orchestras and chamber ensembles, the saxophone rose in popularity with its addition to the jazz band, and perhaps more than any other instrument was responsible for the rise of the solo artist in the big bands of the Swing Era. Saxman Charlie Parker brought the horn to prominence with the birth of bop, and of course the innovations of John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman and Sonny Rollins, and more recently Wayne Shorter, Michael Brecker and Joe Lovano, have helped to ensure another generation of sax disciples. With so many players and recordings, it’s hard to find new artists who stand out. With *The Jazz Life* (Intensity Music, 2007), Newark-based altoist Bradford Hayes provides evidence of the health of modern chamber jazz focused on the saxophone, and the evidence is compelling.

Hayes grew up in Virginia and earned his music education degree at North Carolina A & T State University. A former student of George Coleman and Charles Davis, Hayes spent 15 years with the late Babatunde Olatunji’s Drums Of Passion Band (including a term as Music Director) and has served for 24 years as a music educator in the Newark, NJ Public Schools. *The Jazz Life* is his third release as leader, following *Bianca’s Dance* (2000) and his out-of-print debut, *Our Fathers*.

Aptly titled, this recording most simply is about “The Jazz Life”—the world of melody, improvisation, collaboration and sharing the spotlight, the best qualities of the genre that too often are overshadowed by technical displays and electronic experiments. Even when taking a more smooth direction, as he does on the final track, “Holistic Invention,” Hayes remains true to the defining elements of mainstream post bop.

Out of the gate with “Tunji’s Blues” (written by Hayes in honor of his late employer Olantunji), the sextet (featuring trumpeter Duane Eubanks, trombonist Cornell McGhee, pianist Michael Cochrane, bassist Calvin Jones and drummer Greg Searvance) announces the recording as a hard bop session. In the fashion of the classic bop bands of the 50s and 60s, they cover a lot of music in just 3 ½ minutes, riding through the ensemble/solo/ensemble format with everyone taking a turn. Hayes includes tunes written for his wife “Carolyn,” “My Sons” and (daughter) “Bianca’s Dance.” “Carolyn” features a rambunctious bass line supporting Hayes’ conversational melody and variations on his theme, followed by Cochrane’s simple linear line that evolves into a more interesting improv. Filled with a sweet joy, “My Sons” opens with the horn line in command and a mildly Latin feel. Jones’ melodic bass solo here should be required listening for aspiring young bassists. “Bianca’s Dance” generates a samba-like pulse from the rhythm section while Hayes seems to fly right over it, a joyful and forceful display of technical control and artistic fervor; and Cochrane delivers one of his most charming solos. Hayes’ other composition, “The Desert”—a dedication to Christmas—offers a rather funky trip through the Holy Land, with a soaring solo from Eubanks while McGhee provides all the elements one loves in a trombone—melodic with traces of humor and a bit of growl.

Searvance and Cochrane each contribute one tune: The drummer’s “One Little Indian” is filled with the beats of an old Cowboy and Indian movie and a quick dose of Searvance’s artistry. The shortest track at under three minutes, it covers a lot of rhythmic territory quickly. Cochrane’s “Holistic Invention” gives Hayes his wish, to record a smooth jazz tune. With Cochrane apparently on Fender Rhodes and Jones on electric bass, this is not Kenny G, with a sophisticated improvisation taking the final track along for more than eight minutes, the longest track on the CD. I wouldn’t want a whole album of this sound but it’s a nice change of pace and shows off Hayes’ range as well as the artistic potential of this style.

The remaining tracks include covers of Newark native Wayne Shorter’s “Black Nile,” featuring harmoniously blended horn lines and Cochrane weaving a tight cocoon around the core melody; “The Coaster” from another Newark native, Grachan Moncur III, on which Hayes somersaults over spectacular rhythm section support, with Cochrane dropping chords while bass and percussion act as jet fuel, setting up McGhee’s most impressive statement of the recording; Hayes making short but impassioned work of Hoagy Carmichael’s “The Nearness of You;” and boasting some of his most impressive improvisations on Benny Golson’s “Whisper Not.”

All in all, *The Jazz Life* is a very satisfying ensemble effort with some engaging sax work from an emerging talent.

This review is adapted with permission from a longer article published on the Jazz Police website ([www.jazzpolice.com](http://www.jazzpolice.com)).