

EVENTS - Live! @ SFJAZZ

Steve Slagle (Panorama)

by **Scott Yanow**

Steve Slagle has been such a consistently rewarding soloist (leading 17 previous albums, mostly for SteepleChase and his Panorama label, and appearing on over a hundred others) that it's easy to take the alto saxophonist (and flutist) for granted. He can always be relied on to take solos that display his original sound, virtuosity and ability to enrich and extend the tradition while creating new music. *EVENTS* (initially released as a digital download-only album) is a set of duets he recorded live with pianist Bruce Barth. While one might guess that with that instrumentation the date might emphasize ballads, this is far from the case. From the start of the opening track, the music is burning. While Slagle occasionally tips his hat briefly to Charlie Parker and Phil Woods, he always sounds like himself and every note has audible passion. Barth's playing occasionally recalls McCoy Tyner. He is very much a one-man rhythm section (his bass lines on "Moment's Notice" are particularly enjoyable) and makes the absence of string bass and drums barely noticeable.

The program mixes together originals with standards. The title track sets the bar for what is to follow with fearless, hard-swinging playing, including a torrid tradeoff. The alto saxophonist takes a great break after the melody statement on "Moment's Notice" and is quite fiery on "We release", an excellent post-bop tune with original chord changes. He switches to flute on Thelonious Monk's "Light blue", while keeping the melody close by (as Monk himself preferred). Both "Spirit Call" and "Down Home at Joe Hen's" (the album was recorded at SFJazz' Joe Henderson Lab) are soulful and bluesy without actually being a blues. On "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square", Slagle (on flute again) is tasteful and melodic. The boppish "Alto Manhattan" has a few familiar melody quotes, although the driving piece utilizes a more modern chord structure. "Open air", basically a 12-bar blues with altered chords in the ninth and tenth bars, has an infectious groove reminiscent of "Freedom Jazz Dance". and concluding the release is a bonus track, the original "There Is Still Time", on which Slagle and Barth are joined by singer Sachal Vasandani and Joe Lovano, the latter heard on drums rather than his usual tenor. The title track for an upcoming film, it's a bit of spiritual jazz with wordless vocalizing by Vasandani in unison with the leader's alto.

With *EVENTS*, Steve Slagle continues his perfect string of rewarding recordings.

For more info visit steveslaglemusic.com. Slagle's album release concert is at Dizzy's Club Feb. 6. See Calendar.