



Chuck Israels Jazz Orchestra
Second Wind: A Tribute To The Music
Of Bill Evans

SOULPATCH
 ★★★★★½

As the famous album title has it, everybody digs Bill Evans. But not everybody has sufficiently dug Chuck Israels, Evans' great, underappreciated bassist from his second trio (1962–1966). This album, Israels' return to full-time performing after a 30-year teaching career, should win him new fans for his prodigious skills as both arranger and bassist, even as it serves to remind longtime Evans devotees of his significant

contribution to Evans' body of work.

Israels, of course, was the replacement for the legendary Scott LaFaro, who died in a car accident in 1961, the loss of a friend and creative partner that had devastated Evans. Eventually he found his footing with Israels, who had worked with a who's who of greats including Billie Holiday, Benny Goodman, Coleman Hawkins and John Coltrane. Besides being a brilliant technician with a wonderful round tone, Israels was an exquisitely sensitive musical partner who helped bring out the best in the introspective Evans. After his stint with Evans, Israels studied composition and arranging with Hall Overton, who arranged Thelonious Monk compositions for a tentet at Monk's triumphant 1959 Town Hall concert. Later, Israels became a pioneer of the jazz repertory movement, founding and leading the National Jazz Ensemble from 1973 to 1981.

Although Israels has played Evans tunes with others (notably Danish pianist Thomas Clausen on the excellent 2003 trio album *For Bill*), this is the first time he has orchestrated a whole album of songs associated with or inspired by Evans for a larger ensemble. Over the years there have been many other notable Evans tributes, including a 1998 big-band effort by Don Sebesky and, more recently, Chick Corea's *Further Explorations*, which sought to build on and extend Evans' pioneering ideas about the piano trio format as a near-democracy among the piano, bass and drums.

Few, however, have captured the essence of Evans as faithfully as Israels has here, with an octet he has assembled in his new hometown of Portland, Ore. This thrilling, nearly perfect recording, produced with startling in-your-face clarity by David Berger, is old-school in the best sense; it often sounds like a cool jazz octet or nonet from the early to mid-'60s (minus the tape hiss), sometimes calling to mind Oliver Nelson or Gil Evans. Israels is out to capture the harmonic subtleties of Evans' unique voicings, as well as his innate sense of swing, in an octet setting, and he succeeds splendidly. The tightly disciplined unit combines just the right amount of reverence for the lyricism of Evans' originals with opportunities for the talented band to solo. Israels cracks the whip, however—he eschews noodling, showing off and general screwing around with these brilliant tunes.

The set includes classic Evans compositions like the uptempo "Show-Type Tune"; the tricky-timed "Five," an amusing exercise in cool; and, of course, a generous sampling of the melancholy ballads that were Evans' hallmark, including breathtaking treatments of "Detour Ahead" and "Spring Is Here." Evans combined impressionistic harmonies, keyboard virtuosity and indomitable swing to create something totally new; Israels does for Evans' trio tunes what his teacher Overton did for Monk, which is to say, a lot.

—Allen Morrison

Second Wind: Show-Type Tune; Detour Ahead; Five; Spring Is Here; Waltz For Debby; Margot's Mood; Some Other Time; Minor Tributary; Who Can I Turn To; Israel. (56:17)

Personnel: Chuck Israels, bass, arranger; John Nastos, alto saxophone, flute; David Evans, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Robert Crowell, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet; Paul Mazzio, trumpet, flugelhorn; John Moak, trombone; Dan Gaynor, piano; Christopher Brown, drums; Margot Hanson, Jessica Israels, vocals.

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