

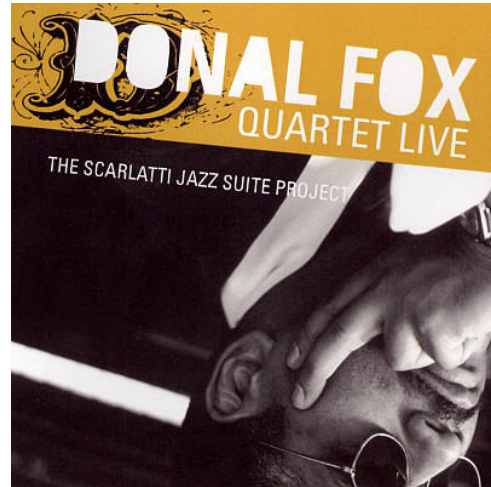


Donal Fox: The Scarlatti Jazz Suite Project

Review by James Manheim

Classical-jazz fusions have enjoyed a renewed vogue after some years of dormancy, and this one by Boston jazz pianist Donal Fox is among the most interesting of the lot.

Buyers from the classical side might wish to take the cover blurbs with a grain of salt. Down Beat's claim that Fox is "confounding the genre police" is difficult to accept, for this is a jazz album, pure and simple; Fox does not perform classical works with jazz inflections like some of his predecessors and contemporaries. What he does do, however, is quite compelling: he uses elements of pieces by Scarlatti, Bach, and Schumann (despite the album's title, Scarlatti plays a comparatively minor role in the proceedings) as fixed objects against which the music can flex its muscles. Each work interprets this process somewhat differently; the substantial Scarlatti Jazz Suite (track 2) that gives the recording its title begins and ends with what is presumably slightly jazzed Scarlatti (the music involved is not identified), breaking it down in between into individual motivic atoms.



The structure of the entire disc is interesting, for not all the music is based on classical pieces; compositions by Horace Silver and John Coltrane seem to circle back indirectly to classical models in their harmonic complexity. Fox adds a third layer of complexity by introducing and reworking two pieces by Astor Piazzolla, who had his own fertile relationship with Baroque structures. Intricate, yet enlivened by many moments of easy recognition, this recording will be of interest to anyone interested in the long history of collaboration and collision between the jazz and classical traditions.