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Recent Recordings by Area Musicians

BY PIOTR MICHALOWSKI

Closer to home and more in the mainstream, we move on to **Joan Belgrave's** new release *Excitable* (no album number, www.joanbowbelgrave.com). The singer performs in tandem with some of the best musicians in this part of the country, Marcus Belgrave (pt, fl), Charlie Gabriel (ts, fl), Chris Smith (tb), Jeff Halsey and Marion Hayden (bs), Gayelynn McKinney and Sean Dobbins (dr), Duncan McMillan, Tadd Weed (pno), as well as New Orleans born young pianist and arranger Sullivan Fortner. Belgrave's albums just keep getting better and on this recital she demonstrates once again that she is a real jazz singer, whose choruses are on a par with those of the instrumentalists, rather than a pop vocalist accompanied by jazz musicians, as is so often the case. Her sense of rhythm and phrasing places her solidly in the jazz tradition, and her sound, as well as her attention to lyrics is a delight. She has surrounded herself with masters, as the list of names well demonstrates, and the results are just predictably first rate. The main soloists, Belgrave and Gabriel, are simply superlative. The former shows once again that there are few mainstream trumpeters who can come close to him on a good day; he has an immediately recognizable sound and style, with an economy of expression that is all his own. Gabriel sticks mostly to the tenor saxophone, displaying his bluesy early modern jazz roots, with a big warm sound that I, for one, never get tired of. Like Belgrave, he can construct a complex longer solo, but also knows how to make a concise, brief statement become memorable. On "[He Called My Name](#)" he follows Belgrave's expressive flugelhorn solo with a well developed and idiomatic flute outing. This is a nice surprise for those of us who have never heard him play the instrument before!



Joan Belgrave has produced a delightful album full of musical variety, backed by great solos and apposite ensemble playing, with well-matched arrangements by Chris Smith, Duncan McMillan, and Sullivan Fortner. Those who had the good fortune to hear her CD release concert at the Kerrytown Concert House in September will know what to expect.

photo: Joan and Marcus Belgrave at the *Excitable* CD release concert photograph by Lars Bjorn