Steve Raybine

Cool Vibes

Bad Kat Records

Steve Raybine is a virtuosic vibraphonist who has been quite busy throughout his career. Raybine spent eight years as a member of the popular group AURACLE (which he co-founded) and has since freelanced in a countless number of settings including with Dizzy Gillespie, Dave Brubeck and Rick Braun. He uplifts every session on which he appears. Cool Vibes is his fourth and most rewarding CD as a leader.

Raybine wrote all but one of the songs on Cool Vibes, also contributing lyrics for three vocals. His music has jazz as its foundation but also seamlessly utilizes aspects of r&b, funk and pop. The 15 concise performances (all but one clock in between 2:19 and 3:53) get their point across quickly with grooving rhythms, catchy ensembles, original themes and purposeful solos. The leader’s vibes are usually in the lead, playing over infectious bass patterns played by Steve Gomez, Mark Haar or Doyle Tipler. The instrumentation varies throughout the program.

The opening “Del Mar Beach” is an excellent example of the music on this set. The melodic performance features the active bass patterns of Gomez, fluent playing by Raybine, and three horns that add to the excitement of the ensembles. There are many other highlights. The vibes are well featured on the melodic and atmospheric “Kiss Me” and “Kickin’ Back,” a pair of contemporary pieces that stick in one’s mind afterwards. Two versions of the spirited blues “Cool Drinks” include heated blues playing by guitarist Jeff Scheffler plus a vocal by Nate Van Fleet on the first rendition. The energetic “Sno ‘Fun” has a prominent part for Steve Kujala on flute and piccolo. Altoist Stan Harper’s soulful playing adds to the passion of “Desert Pearl” while his soprano is in the limelight on “Coral Breeze.” The Latin tinged “Salsa Verde” has a rewarding spot for Raybine’s vibes and a memorable cool-toned Paul Desmond-inspired alto solo by his son, David Raybine. “Bad Kat Karma” has the Raybines and Harper joined very effectively by the Westside High School Concert Jazz Band Of Omaha. Cool Vibes concludes with “Tree Of Life,” a showcase for Steve Raybine’s unaccompanied vibes.

With all of its variety, Cool Vibes has a strong unity and is filled with rhythmic melodies. Its performances are both accessible and creative. The result is an infectious program that is easy to enjoy.

Scott Yanow, jazz journalist/historian and author of 11 books including The Great Jazz Guitarists