

Galen Weston – Plugged In

Travis Rogers, JazzTimes

Galen Weston has been playing guitar for many years but don't look in back catalogues for his name in the credits. Weston has spent an extended amount of time running the Internet business that he himself established. Now, and at long last, Weston has come to the end of a "two year journey" of preparation and has released his debut album "Plugged In" on the Blujazz label (BJ3430). Weston claims inspiration from notable guitarists Eric Johnson, George Benson, Pat Metheny and more but the listener would do well to let comparisons fall by the wayside. Weston has a voice that is truly his own and he speaks through his much-loved guitars with single-minded originality.

Weston is joined on "Plugged In" by brilliant Toronto session players like David Woodhead on bass and Al Cross on drums with Matt Horner and Simeon Abbott on piano and keyboards, respectively. Richard Underhill adds his sax and Rick Shadrach Lazar his percussion. The lovely voice of Lenka Lichtenberg also makes a beautiful appearance.

The album opens with "Funk Opus #2." It carries a rough-edged, albeit lyrical, theme with David Woodhead's bass punctuating the melodic line. Al Cross adds a solid drum groove with swells from the keyboards of Simeon Abbott.

"Song for Daphne" is a beautiful ballad for Weston's youngest daughter. The guitar is warm and narrative while the sax adds a sweet side voice and the organ and piano creating a backdrop for the exquisite guitar. At 11:58, it is the longest piece on the album but that length allows wide expression for guitar and sax. The piano takes on a Gospel feel and the bass and drums keep a steady Jazz rhythm in play. This is beautifully written and warmly performed.

"Bensonite" has, of course, got George Benson in mind. There are the descriptive Benson Jazz-funk guitar riffs that are "morphed during the process to a bit of Larry Carlton style," Weston says. Weston is too modest in his attributions. What he calls influences and styles are really his own colors on his sonic palette. He chooses his colorful tones and approaches extremely well and keeps the hues and tones completely original. "Bensonite" concludes with exciting batucada contributions and Brazilian rhythm. It doesn't get much better than a fun samba to walk out the track.

"The Yellow Guitar (A Guitarra Amarela)" is a nod to his favorite guitar, his yellow Fender Stratocaster. This is the track that truly highlights how cleanly Weston plays. Again he cites influences in the liner notes but again that should in no way detract from the marvelous musicianship of Weston himself. To concentrate on his inspirations is to miss the inspiration that Weston himself creates. Although Weston may himself feel as if he has missed years of playing experience because of business endeavors, he has taken his life experiences and used them to create moving musical works. He writes of family and home and conveys to us what he has learned for himself.

"Rose Garden" is for Weston's oldest daughter. There are stunning chord changes here and the gorgeous vocal intonations of Lenka Lichtenberg enhance the piece in extraordinary measures. Underhill's sax and Horner's piano are coolly interactive together. Woodhead and Cross are equally cool and steady. It is almost a study in duets on this track, often switching between players. Such a well-crafted and meaningful song. Rose must be an angel.

"Country" is an acoustic piece that is Weston's treatment of the magnificent Keith Jarrett original on his splendid 1978 album "My Song." Woodhead has a wonderful bass solo here which works so well against Cross' great play. Furthermore, for a guitarist to cover a Jarrett tune is rare but, in this case, absolutely lovely.

"Galen's Vice—A Tribute to the 80s" is a ripping guitar tip of the hat to Jan Hammer's Jazz-rock "Miami Vice" theme. The corps progression is set off against the wail of Underhill's sax while Rick Shadrach Lazar works cool progression to enhance the Hammer effect. What I thought was going to be a bit of a send-up piece turned out to be very interesting and a great showcase for Weston's tightest moments.

“Austin” is one of the sharpest Jazz tracks on the album. Matt Horner does double-duty on piano and organ as Underhill interacts smartly with Weston. Guitar, sax, keys and bass all get to smoke their solos. Gorgeous stuff. It is like a grand recognition of the great music scene in Austin, Texas.

“Tasteless” is a straight-ahead rocker. Woodhead and Cross get to have fun with rock rhythms and yet play beyond simple rock. This is deeper and more imaginative than the limitations often imposed by rock.

The tone changes drastically for “Like Someone in Love.” The song is a Jimmy Van Heusen cover but is reinterpreted nicely with a solo guitar intro. It is warm and sweet and the guitar-bass-drums trio is completely effective. The cool chords are entirely memorable and Woodhead’s bass is creative and captivating. The trio is pianissimo during the bass solo creating a powerful resonance.

“Late and Never” is another rock-ish piece that Weston works over smartly. The crossing of rock guitar and rockabilly piano are too fun to resist.

The album concludes with “Rock Jam” which opens brilliant interplay between guitar and bass. The trio launches in full force for this one. There is a broad lyricism at work here and the trio is in the pocket at all the right places.

Galen Weston states that he is “on a mission to catch up with the years I lost in music.” Music has waited patiently for Weston. He is right on time.