

12/07/15 Albums By Travis Rogers

The Fred Hughes Trio Promises "I'll Be Home for Christmas"

A Dose of Holiday Jazz

The Fred Hughes Trio has turned in some beautiful previous recordings such as "Out of The Blue", "Live", "No Turning Back," "Love Letters" and, on DVD, "In Concert." Now Hughes with Amy Shook (bass) and Frank Russo (drums) have offered a terrific holiday gift with "I'll Be Home for Christmas" on ShoreThing Records.

"I'll Be Home for Christmas" is an 11-track album with the standard holiday hits. The difference here is that these Christmas chestnuts are done with class and cool.

The album is opened with "Winter Wonderland." The usual vocal line is replaced with simple chords to set the listener up for the fun improvisations to follow. A fine Latin groove takes over the piece and Shook's bass steals a rolling solo to be followed by Russo swinging solo on drums.

Hughes brings it back together with the familiar melodic line but with that ever-so-lovely Latin sway. A fine start.

"O Christmas Tree" begs to swing and Hughes lets it do just that. A bit Guaraldi, a bit Ellington and a lot of Hughes. This is "O Tannenbaum" the way it was meant to be heard. Listen carefully to get a kick out of Shook's bass solo.

"Silver Bells" starts with solo piano has the essential New York City cool feel that the piece requires. Russo's brushes give the image of swirling patterns of snow as taxis rush by and Shook's murmuring bass gives the hum of electric lights.

The bustle of the street gives way to the coziness of the living room fireplace in "Let It Snow." The piece swings delightfully like a couple dancing in the warmth of their home while the snow falls just outside the window. It is a playful, fanciful and mirthful shield against the cold of the outside.

"Silent Night" cuts loose in a brilliant and bluesy Gospel treatment. Far from "silent," this is a raucous romp that thunders in celebration. The one has to be heard.

The Hughes Trio version of "White Christmas" must have Bing Crosby rolling over somewhere. A world away from the smooth croon, the Caribbean beat and warm melody conjures images of white sand on blue beaches more than white snow on blue lips.

"Santa Claus is Comin' to Town" is an R&B feast with equal portions of ham from all three of the trio. Exciting in its expectancy of the arrival of the man with the sleigh, it is like staying up late with loud celebrations waiting for Christmas morning.

"The Christmas Song" is warm and accepting and full of hope for everyone who still believes in the utter joy of friendship and love. It is sweet without being sappy. So help me, it makes you want to hug the nearest person.

Of course, "Jingle Bells" just has to be jovial and bouncy and this is precisely what Hughes lays down. With a touch of Fats Waller, Hughes gets an additional bounce from Shook and Russo. It is a whimsical treatment, just like it should be. It tweaks your nose and bites you on the cheek.

Like everyone's desire, "I'll Be Home for Christmas" promises to be close for the holidays. Amy Shook's bass takes on the vocal line in a slow and sad realization that we may only be close to each other in our dreams. The track ends with great expectation from Hughes' piano. Sad and lovely.

Thank goodness that Fred Hughes didn't leave us hanging with the melancholy of "I'll Be Home for Christmas." Instead, The Fred Hughes Trio gives a charming and warm farewell to us with "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas." It swings and sways and gets everyone in the place smiling. As the unsung lyrics declare, "Through the years /We all will be together/If the Fates allow/Hang a shining star upon the highest bough/And have yourself A merry little Christmas now." Now that's the way to end a Christmas album.

Fred Hughes has been swinging since 1981. He has released many albums of great Jazz and has been a great teacher of Jazz all the while. With "I'll Be Home for Christmas," Hughes and his trio teaches how to enjoy the holidays, think on the holidays, and do it in a Jazz way.

Thanks for making Christmas a little bit merrier, Fred, Amy and Frank.