

SAMI LINNA QUARTET: 'Sami Linna Quartet' (Timmion)

Written by Charles Waring

Sunday, 16 June 2019 08:07 - Last Updated Monday, 17 June 2019 11:58



Given that he's a lecturer at Helsinki's prestigious Sibelius Academy and is halfway through writing a doctoral thesis, 45-year-old **Sami Linna** is undoubtedly a serious student of music. But aside from his academic pursuits, Linna is also a bona fide jazz musician: a guitarist, in fact, who's been active since the 1990s. Here, his superb quartet (with saxophonist Jussi Kannaste, organist Mikko Heleva, and veteran US drummer, Dana Hall, who's worked with jazz greats Joe Henderson and Bobby Hutcherson) makes its debut with a self-titled album comprising five extended cuts.

Seamlessly fusing post-bop with modal jazz, the group's material ranges from authentic-sounding hard-swinging soul jazz (like the propulsive 'Umoya,' written by drummer, Hall) to more explorative works in the shape of the haunting 'Mode For Tomorrow,' which channels the spirit of jazz organ pioneer Larry Young during his late '60s Blue Note phase.

Young's DNA is detectible, too, on the set's impressive opener, the Dana Hall-penned 'Black Mountain.' It's an open-ended piece where sax and guitar entwine on the main theme before Linna breaks off for a guitar solo that highlights not only his fleet-of-finger dexterity but also his impeccable good taste. The only cover is a blissful take on Hank Mancini's 'Dreamsville' (originally penned in 1958 for the US TV detective show *Peter Gunn*) which brings to mind the work of Grant Green when he recorded with Hammond B3 organists like 'Baby Face Willette' in the early '60s. The album's closer is the Linna-penned 'Clowns,' a funkafied soul-jazz groove peppered with ace solos from all the main protagonists.

Though there's a palpable retro aura to the music, there's also a cool contemporary feel, which makes this album seem fresh and vital. Toe-tappingly good.

(CW) 4/5

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