



Josh Shpak



Josh Shpak

Astatic (INTERROBANG)

This debut by Josh Shpak, a trumpet and flugelhorn player who's in his early 20s, seems longer than 33 minutes. Layered and evocative, Shpak's arrangements of these six originals — five of them his own — guide his ensemble across varied terrain; this is anything but a classic blowing session. With aplomb, he soars through accompaniment that ranges from heavy, electronic throbbing to impressionistic backgrounds, and the unexpected transitions within each tune creates a unique

journey for the listener. A protégé of the late Clark Terry, Shpak plays with warmth and lyricism, but group expression overshadows any specific characteristics of his style; ultimately, the variety of orchestral settings highlights his significant harmonic explorations more than his tasteful solos.

This is a classy album, from the surrealist cover art by Leigh J. McCloskey to the LP-looking disc, complete with ridged, vinyl grooves. Taken together — surrealism united with history — they reflect Shpak's intention to respect his elders while moving in his own youthful direc-

tions. Yes, some will notice similarities to Herbie Hancock or Pat Metheny, but there's nothing slavishly imitative about these cuts. Part of that has to do with instrumentation: Shpak comfortably unites acoustic jazz instruments with electronics (guitars, Minimoog synth bass). He also softens the environment with a string quintet, as well as Simon Moullier on vibraphone and, truly enhancing two of the numbers, Roni Eytan on harmonica. He thinks and listens deeply. Centered and mature, this a fine first effort by a horn player who fully identifies with the 21st century. —Sascha Feinstein