



Contrebasse Solo - Expansion
Fabien Sevilla (Unit)
by Terrell Holmes

In Zen Buddhism a koan is a sometimes-paradoxical statement used in meditation and attainment of spiritual enlightenment. Fabien Sevilla uses koans as the organizing principle for *Expansion*, his audacious technique and fecund imagination creating a standout work for solo acoustic bass. The album was recorded in a theater and the acoustics function as a silent collaborator, adding refreshing immediacy.

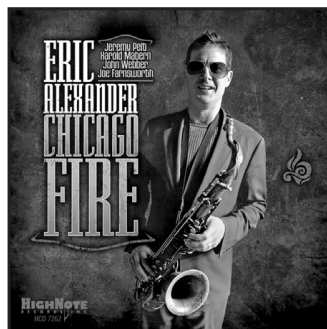
Sevilla's variation on "Giant Steps" is in the spirit of another Coltrane classic, "Countdown". He adroitly drops recognizable fragments of the song amid some vigorous plucking and concludes with the head. "Auhsoj", "Four Winds", "Monody" and "Serenade" are further examples of Sevilla's adventurous approach. The excellent title track is a three-part suite in arco with the mood and pacing of a Bach cello suite. And where this tune is serious, the opposite is true of "Valentine", a mad dash among arco, pizzicato and spiccato, complete with cartoon-grade glissandi, dazzling atonality, whispered stream-of-consciousness musings, intermittent exhalations and eccentric vocalizing.

The koans account for most of the album and "Koan 101", "Koan 102" and "Koan 103" are departures

as solo piano pieces. Whether or not they provide spiritual enlightenment is questionable, but they do provide contrast. The bass pieces are ruminative, elegant, varying from the sub-two-minute conciseness of "Koan 101" to the effusive "Koan 6", almost "Valentine" in miniature. Koans are supposed to be chastening but this one seems to have taught Sevilla impatience; he pounds his instrument urgently as if jarring loose notes clinging to the inside of the body.

Closer "Koan 104" best sums up Sevilla's musical philosophy. Opening with hypnotic bass strumming accompanied by prepared piano, Sevilla embraces the idea of paradox by having one person play a duet.

For more information, visit unitrecords.com. Sevilla plays solo at Ibeam Brooklyn Jun. 7th and 19th, the ISIM Conference at The New School Jun. 8th, ABC No-Rio Jun. 8th, SEEDS Jun. 11th and Church of St. Luke and St. Matthew Jun. 12th. See Calendar.



Chicago Fire
Eric Alexander (HighNote)
by Joel Roberts

Tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander arrived in New York in the early '90s with a no-nonsense, hardbop style that already seemed fully formed. In the more than 20 years

since, sticking pretty much to the same straightahead line, he's released a series of consistently rewarding albums as a leader. His latest, the aptly titled *Chicago Fire*, is an homage to the Windy City's rich tradition of blazing tenor players. Alexander knows this turf well, having spent some of his formative musical years there and his bluesy, full-bodied tenor style is a natural fit with the Chicago sound. Alexander is joined by a quartet of longtime colleagues: veteran pianist Harold Mabern, bassist John Webber and drummer Joe Farnsworth. Dynamic trumpeter Jeremy Pelt is heard to fine effect on three tunes, bringing a furious Lee Morgan swagger to Mabern's "The Bee Hive", a tune written in honor of a legendary Chicago nightclub.

Other songs offer direct tributes to members of Chicago's tenor sax royalty. "Eddie Harris" conjures up the same kind of infectious soul-jazz beat that Harris and Les McCann made a career with in the '60s. "Blueski for Vonski", for the underappreciated Von Freeman, is introduced by spoken reminiscences of this unique personality, followed by a downhome blues featuring some especially delicious licks from Mabern. The pianist's "Mr. Stitt" is penned for Sonny Stitt, not a Chicago native, but a frequent visitor to the city with tenor partner and Chicagoan Gene Ammons. Finally, Cole Porter's "Just One of Those Things" is dedicated to the great Johnny Griffin, the "Little Giant" of jazz, whose explosive, high-speed style Alexander channels with impressive dexterity.

Alexander and company generate plenty of heat throughout *Chicago Fire*, making this one of his finest efforts and about as satisfying an example of spirited mainstream jazz as you're likely to find.

For more information, visit jazzdepot.com. Alexander is at Blue Note Jun. 8th and Smoke Jun. 13th-14th. See Calendar.

