

ARTHUR SATYAN: “ART FOR ART’S SAKE”

The debut album of Armenian Jazz player/composer **Arthur Satyan** emanates four years after recording the music. Satyan, coming from a family of musicians, had left Yerevan and came to Beirut in the mid-nineties at the beginning of Jazz music craze that swept the city after long years of besieged wars. He has certainly given the Jazz scene in the previously tormented city a fresh, bright, professional and particular music tone that Jazz fans and musicians alike are enjoying in concerts, pubs and jazz cafes.

It all started in Armenia where Satyan composed “**Shades of Blue**”, the opening track of the album. It sets the pace for the whole album and the passionate music to come: Relaxed, groovy and swinging. “I wrote this tune imagining Wayne Shorter’s sound of soprano saxophone playing it. I had a bit different groove for this tune. I re-arranged the melody and changed the ending, giving this piece more fresh sound.” Arthur said.

The invigorating interpretation of Charlie Parker’s “**Confirmation**” confirms the swinging power that **Vardan Arakelyan** has added to this tune. It was his short presence in Beirut that pushed Arthur to record this album. The relationship of the two musicians is obvious in the way both artists complete each other’s performance. Arthur is playing with such cheerfulness and bliss that he is willing to use all the piano keys, and may be borrow some more if he could! **Afra**’s keen and ardent rhythms are soothing and calming. The end result is an exhilarating music that touches your soul with extreme passion to groove.

Chucho Valdes’ “**Mambo Influenciado**” re-arranged by Arthur has developed into a Lebanese favorite Jazz anthem for fans and musicians as Satyan describes it. Why? The arrangement is clear, happy and joyful. Arthur’s solos over mambo rhythms transform the tune into a standard ballad with a cheerful growing-up tempo.

“The idea of playing “**On Green Dolphin Street**” came up when Vardan was tuning his bass.” Arthur told me. “He tuned in a groove you hear at the beginning of the track. Listening to him, I told the sound engineer to start the recording session, and asked Vardan to keep on “tuning”. The interpretation of this Jazz standard is unique. The “Tuning” feel has strongly added a wired thrill to the performance of Vardan, and gave a fantastic futuristic opening for the tune. Satyan has clearly used this effect to his advantage to build “symphonic” Latin piano energetic solos that give listeners a joy originating from these sudden and sharp contrast effects on their minds and souls.

“**Blue Bossa**” is a definitive groovy bass tune. **Abboud Saadi** explores his striking technique with simplicity and funk playing the main bass, and Vardan adds marvelous steady accompaniment. The trembling congas inject colossal compulsive dose of swing to Kenny Durham’s standard. A piano-less groovy track leaves the stage for free and stirring sounds of strings.

The second Satyan’s original “**Art’s Minor Blues**” is a mystic composition on C minor. A bluesy yet enchanting and laid-back tune, Arthur’s phrases are unexpected but extremely melodic. The music directs us to New York’s 54 street Jazz clubs. The hailing sounds of “yeah” are in the air. You get the feel of Arthur moving off the piano bench at the end of each phrase. Fantastic feel!

The apogee of the album is reached with the extremely sensitive, lyrical arrangement of Gershwin’s “**Summertime**”. The **added** strings (4 violins and 2 cellos) replace the lyrics: “Summertime and the groove is playing, notes are jumping and the mood is high. All the solos are rich and all the “cats” are swingin’.....”. Arthur’s magnificent arrangement, his devoted talent in composition and sturdy experience in classical music had definitely made this tune my favorite. In the introduction, Arthur has brilliantly blended-in an original Armenian tune “Garun a” (meaning

Spring), which swiftly gave way to "Summer". Listen carefully to the negotiating ending by Satyan and his friend **Hovannes Gevorkyan** playing the first violin: A very tantalizing conversation leaving you famished for more.

"**Back to Bop**" takes us back to the live setting of this composition by Satyan. *"This is a small dedication to Ahmad Jamal, one of my all times favorite pianists."* Arthur said. The grandiosity of the tune's bridge and the relaxed, swirling and pulsating solos of Arthur create a constructive and keen template for Jazz Bop fifty years later.

Satyan ends his album with his very funky and hip composition "Super Movies". It has the reminiscing feel of all the original "Fusion" groups of the seventies. *"It is a spontaneous joke, which I did in the studio, asking Abboud to play the rhythmic figure. It's free; there is no chord progression in the beginning. Chords enter after the culmination of the tune with strings."* Art said laughing. He added: *"strings are playing the first part of Coltrane's "Giant Steps", but in the long count. The chords are changed of course, that's why it is hard to guess that this was a small part of "Giant Steps". I took the name from the movie channel "Super movies", where they have warnings for adult movies. So, caution is suggested!!!!"*

Arthur Satyan and his group have recorded a very rich blend of fantastic grooving tunes of various tastes, and a magnificent album that is worth playing repeatedly from the first second till the last music beat. Satyan's passionate desire for composition, arrangement and performance has effaced this young Jazzman's natural timidity. His immense talents, coupled with his insightful jazzy spirit, took us back and forth between bop, cool, fusion and his own Jazz interpretation style, to create a combination of unique music tunes that leave the listener dazzled and content in a serenity of lavish and sumptuous sounds.

Dr. AZ