

Dave Stryker - Strikin Ahead



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The notion of moving forward by triangulating a space between creative and pragmatic imperatives is a consistent thread throughout Dave Stryker's four decades in the jazz business, not least on *Strykin' Ahead*, his 28th CD as a leader. Stryker augments his working trio of Jared Gold on organ and McClenty Hunter on drums with vibraphone player Steve Nelson, all on-board for a second go-round after their stellar contributions to last year's *Eight-Track II*. Stryker is a preternaturally flexible and in-the-moment improviser with deep roots in the tradition who knows how to push the envelope without damaging the contents. Stryker internalized those imperatives on a 1984-1986 run with Brother Jack McDuff, and he received further invaluable training in the art of musical communication during a decade on the road with Stanley Turrentine, to whom he paid homage on the 2015 release *Don't Mess With Mister T*.

In contrast to his *Eight Track II* conception of putting his spin on pop hits of his formative years, Stryker returns to his long-standing practice of presenting originals and reharmonized standards from the jazz and show music songbooks. "Shadowboxing" is a burning 14-bar minor blues; his well-considered chordal variations on Wayne Shorter's "Footprints" proceed to a simmering 5/4 figure. Next is "New You" (a stimulating Stryker contrafact of the oft-played "There Will Never Be Another You"). He personalizes Billy Strayhorn's "Passion Flower," set to Hunter's insinuating bossa-funk groove. The title track "Strykin' Ahead" has a Cadillac-racing-down-the-freeway-feel; he imbues the lovely melody of "Who Can I Turn To" with the full measure of his plush, inviting tone.

That Stryker knows his Albert King is evident on the slow-drag "Blues Down Deep," which evokes wee-hours third sets in the inner city grills and lounges of Stryker's apprentice years. He knows his bebop, too. On Clifford Brown's "Joy Spring," the solo flights over Stryker's "modernized" progressions transpire over Hunter's drum-bass beats and crisp, medium-up four-on-the-cymbal; on the chopbusting "Donna Lee," all members springboard off a churchy vamp and Hunter's funk-infused swing.

"I've always wanted to write vehicles that are fun and interesting to blow over," Stryker says. "Trying to come up with a beautiful melody that lasts is very fulfilling. Writing is a big part of my voice in this music." Stryker is too modest to say that his voice is also a big part of jazz, to which he's devoted a career marked by consistent application of the values that he espouses. But that's all right—*It* say it for him.

Whether you've heard guitarist Dave Stryker leading his own group (with 26 CD's as a leader to date), co-leading The Stryker/Slagle Band, or as a featured sideman with Stanley Turrentine, Jack McDuff, and many others, you know why the *Village Voice* calls him "one of the most distinctive guitarists to come along in recent years."

Dave's new CD "Messin' with Mister T"; is a celebration of the man he worked with for over a decade—Stanley Turrentine, "Mister T"—with ten of the greatest tenor sax players on the scene today. It went to #1 on JazzWeek Radio and stayed in the Top 50 for 20 weeks and has received great reviews including 4 1/2 stars in *Downbeat* magazine. Dave's last CD "Eight Track" was #9 for 2014 on the Jazz Week Radio Charts where it stayed for 20 weeks topping off at #3 for 3 weeks. *Downbeat* magazine picked it as one of the Top CD's of 2014, ran a feature article in the June 2014 issue on Dave, and voted him into the 2014 *Downbeat* Critics and Readers Poll for the 7th time.

Dave Stryker grew up in Omaha, Nebraska and moved to New York City in 1980. After establishing himself in the local music scene, he joined organist Jack McDuff's group for two years 1984-85. When McDuff wasn't on the road (literally traveling by van all over the country) they worked a steady four-night a week gig at Dude's Lounge in Harlem. His first break, this turned out to be an invaluable experience, paying his dues night after night with the soulful jazz organist. It was at Dude's Lounge that Stryker met tenor saxophonist Stanley Turrentine, who would occasionally sit in. After leaving McDuff, Turrentine asked Stryker to join his quintet. From 1986-1995 he played with the legendary saxophonist at all the major festivals, concert halls, and clubs throughout the world. He is featured on two Turrentine CD's (Stanley recorded Stryker's tune "Sidesteppin"). With Turrentine, Stryker was able to play with such jazz greats as Dizzy Gillespie and Freddie Hubbard. The ten years playing alongside the tenor legend helped Stryker realize the importance of having his own sound. Dave continued to work with Stanley and was with him during his final week at the Blue Note in NYC, when he passed in Sept. 2000.

Early on Stryker realized that as much as he loved playing standards and the jazz repertoire he had to have something of his own to give to the music. He feels that his writing combined with his playing is what shapes his musical expression. He has recorded and published over 150 of his own compositions and has released "The Dave Stryker Songbook" with most of his original music. Also 18 of the compositions (from the first five *SteepleChase* CD's) are compiled in the book: "The Music of Dave Stryker" (*SteepleChase Music*) which can be ordered on this website.

Some of the other artists who have recorded Dave's music are: Stanley Turrentine, Kevin Mahogany, Victor Lewis, and Steve Slagle. Dave continues to perform with The Dave Stryker Organ Trio, his Blue to the Bone Band, and The Stryker/Slagle Band. Recent gigs for The Stryker/Slagle Band have included a recent week at Dizzy's Club Coca Cola at Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Monterey Jazz Festival, The Blue Note in Las Vegas, The Jazz Bakery in LA, and a 2003 tour of Japan.

Sideman work has included vocalist Kevin Mahogany's group, with Dave writing and arranging music for Kevin's Telarc release "Pride and Joy" and "Another Time, Another Place" on Warner Bros and tours of Europe, Japan, Brazil, Poland and Carnegie Hall. He also has worked with Blue Note saxophonist Javon Jackson and pianist Eliane Elias. He has appeared on over 50 CD's as a sideman. As a producer, Stryker compiled the CD "The Guitar Artistry of Billy Rogers" which is the only existing record of the brilliant jazz playing of the late underground legend who was his friend, former teacher and member of the Crusaders. He has also produced "A Tribute to Grant Green" on Evidence Music.

Dave is the Adjunct Professor of Jazz guitar at Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, and at the John J. Cali School of Music at Montclair State University. He is passing along his experience by teaching privately and at The Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshop, The Litchfield Jazz Camp, and the Jazzhouse Kids Workshop in Montclair, NJ. His book "Dave Stryker's Jazz Guitar Improvisation Method" (Mel Bay Publishing) is available here on his website at www.davestryker.com.

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