



Cure All - Robert Walter

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Cure All - Robert Walter, Palmetto Records PM 2132

Emphasis (on Parenthesis) - Stanton Moore Trio, Telarc Records CD-83681

Sometimes a change of scene is just what the doctor ordered. A few years ago, after a lengthy and successful run in San Diego, organist/pianist Robert Walter made the decision to move to New Orleans. While his move was tragically greeted by Hurricane Katrina and its brutal aftermath, it also led to a creative upswing for the funky purveyor of soul jazz. Walter was now living in the presence of several of his musical idols and was afforded the opportunity to play with many of them, often finding himself gigging in improv-heavy trios led by the legendary drummer, Johnny Vidacovich. Around the same time, Walter solidified his bond with old friend Stanton Moore, the one-time prized pupil of Vidacovich, as Moore successfully recorded and toured in a trio with Walter and guitarist Wil Bernard. Suddenly, the man behind the keys for the Greyboy All-Stars found himself in demand in his new hometown. Now two fine albums featuring Walter in a trio format have just been released, and each album proves to be an excellent depiction of New Orleans' influence on Robert Walter and vice-versa.

Walter's own *Cure All* enlists Vidacovich and the very talented upright bassist James Singleton for its low-down, dirty stroll through a wide spectrum of varied and grooving compositions. The opening "Snakes and Spiders" is a heavy, lead-footed strut and familiar turf for Walter, while "Money Changes" allows Vidacovich to alternate between graceful swinging and a tight Latin samba. It's not often that one hears Walter on a baby grand, but this track is probably some of his finest and most varied work on the pearly 88s. The title cut is the kind of thick, deep-rooted, sand-in-your-pants style funk that one expects from Walter's thumping Hammond, and in listening to the nasty main groove, it's quite evident that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree when you're comparing the rhythms of protégé Stanton Moore and mentor Johnny Vidacovich. Walter oddly re-casts the reggae classic "Rivers of Babylon" as a straight, old-time spiritual, and there's a nice bit of juxtapositioning in "Maple Plank," as Vidacovich lays down an throbbing second-line beat that intertwines with and morphs around Walter's swirling organ. The final highlight on this album of highlights, comes courtesy of "Measure Up," a tune with a wickedly playful swing feel, one that's sure to elicit Walter's trademark involuntarily joyful snarls. The highly danceable grooves on *Cure All* show the many sides of Robert Walter, a major talent who is somehow able to evoke musicians as diverse as Dave Brubeck, Bobby Timmons, Big John Patton, and Ramsey Lewis, while still maintaining his own sound.

The Stanton Moore Trio's *Emphasis (on parenthesis)* requires a few listens before it can be fully appreciated. While it lacks the rangy variety of *Cure All*, the mere fact that Stanton Moore, Robert Walter, and Wil Bernard have already recorded a previous album and have had a few successful

tours together enables them with a sense of familiarity and a clear mission. Moore doesn't waste time exploring new terrain with this unit; rather he lasers in on a dark and heavy funk theme, and every track on the very cohesive album remains nestled within that realm. The trio's fondness for heavy metal is evident in both the weighty "(Proper) Gander" and the intense "(Who Ate the) Layer Cake," while there is an air of mystery that surrounds "Wissions (of Vu)," which was created as a dissection of a Wu Tang Clan original. "Over (Compensatin')" is certainly the pinnacle of this album, thanks to the highly addictive grooves of its early Meters-inspired strut. Everyone shines on this gem, but Bernard takes the cake with a devilishly raunchy solo. Speaking of raunchy, Moore creates a filthy, slinking backbeat and Walter and Bernard gamely fall in line on "(I Have) Super Strength," which sounds as though it could have been ripped from the soundtrack of any late-night movie on Cinemax. Throughout the entire album, Moore remains fixated on his signature thunderous beats cloaked in darkness, giving the record a very sinister intensity.

While Walter's work in Cure All finds him dancing all over the stylistic map, his efforts in Emphasis (on parenthesis) are focused and precise. Having to provide the bassline in the Stanton Moore Trio restricts his ability to roam, but it also forces him to narrow his sights and hone in on those dark and rumbling grooves. Each album displays a different side of Robert Walter, and each is ripe with merits. By the same token, fans of either Johnny Vidacovich or Stanton Moore can hear plenty of intersection between the unique beats of teacher and student. Thus, it's a fortunate confluence of events that finds both Cure All and Emphasis (on parenthesis) being released at the same time, and fans of Robert Walter, Stanton Moore, or Johnny Vidacovich would be well advised to pick up both albums.