

JAZZTIMES

LANNY MORGAN

A Suite for Yardbird
Fresh Sound FSR 5023 CD (65:21)

An alto saxophonist performing Charlie Parker's "Ko Ko" faces two challenges: The first is reproducing the melody line, "Bird's solo on the chords of "Cherokee." It is a chorus of improvisational mastery that has boggled minds for 54 years. Lanny Morgan's technique allows him to blow past that concern with ease. The second—and greater—challenge for the saxophonist is to follow the brilliant Parker set piece with a solo that succeeds on its own terms. Morgan's two choruses on "Ko Ko" are full of Bird's spirit and much of his vocabulary, but he uses Parker's language in a statement that is forthrightly Morganesque. His work in 11 other Parker compositions is equally personal and original within the idiom.

Beyond Morgan's achievement in this Parker tribute, the success of the album is also due to the rhythm section and the way the four musicians work together. Lou Levy, a piano master shockingly ignored in the music industry's frenzied concern with the marketability of youth, is at his best here. The relaxation, co-gency and humor of his solo at a fast tempo on "The Hymn" should be singled out, but his creative level is as high everywhere. In Levy's three choruses on "Steeplechase," he demonstrates that a creative musician can always find something fresh in the "I Got Rhythm" changes. Tom Warrington is a bassist with a big, centered tone, and with note choices so compelling that his lines can mesmerize the listener. Paul Kreibich, an increasingly impressive drummer, works hand in glove with Warrington and Levy: his solo on "The Hymn," with piano and bass accompaniment, is a fine example of their unity. This is a stimulating CD.

—Doug Ramsey