fans. Smalls was such a room. The new Smalls Records label picks up on the small group legacy of the room, getting that vibe across to a larger audience.

Across 7 Street is the unwieldy name for a quintet that played at Smalls every Sunday night for nine years. A weekly gig like that can give a band some truly serious chops, and **(1)** is the living proof. Their book of 50 or so tunes has been developed over time, with arrangements evolved through constant playing. It's not often the case that a band works together this long before recording, and while such a lengthy incubation period is obviously not going to work for a lot of ensembles, the advantages of this approach are apparent throughout the disc.

With material contributed by saxophonist Chris Byers, trombonist John Mosca, and pianist Sacha Perry, this is a totally swinging date that can be listened to straight through with pleasure. Veteran Mosca, who also is the musical director of the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, and Byers, who studied with Barry Harris, make for an attractive front line, while the on-the-money rhythm section cooks and roils in support. Byars' informative liner notes discuss each selection in theoretical terms, but unless you're trying to learn the tunes, there's not much need to know that Roland's "St. Francis Dimes," for instance, begins "with two A sections in B major, and a B section in E flat." What you do want to know is that these cats can really play, and fans of modern small group sounds are likely to dig this one from start to finish.

Ari Hoenig's debut with his working band on **(2)** is an equally delightful encounter with some of the younger talents on the NY scene. Drummer Hoenig, who wrote the lion's share of the material, is interested in real development in his compositions, not the tired head/solos/head format that has been the small group standard for so long. As co-producer, Hoenig put some thought into sequencing the CD. The disc opens with the only trio track, a version of Monk's "I Mean You" that sets the agenda for this band's sound: dramatic and rapid-fire changes in tempo and attack, tightly arranged but never claustrophobic or artificial sounding. They go out with the band's take on Gershwin's venerable "Summertime." In between, there are originals like the fiery "Condemnation," co-written by Hoenig and saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart, followed by another long absorbing piece, "Birdless." This beautifully played composition starts out as a ballad, and ends up somewhere else entirely without leaving the listener behind. On track after track, Hoenig is clearly in command of the band from behind his kit, but his innate sensitivity and good taste keep him from ever making the music drum-heavy.

Two quibbles: saxophonist Schwartz-Bart has a tendency to let himself get over-excited on his horn, lapsing into barely controlled high-pitched squeals. And the mix of tracks both with and without an audience is a bit disconcerting at times, with random bursts of applause at odd moments. But those are small things. This is a genuinely exciting date that reveals more of itself each time around. I fully expect to enjoy both of these heartily recommended discs for years to come.

Stuart Kremsky

1) LUCA FLORES & GIKO PAVAN, DREAMS, SPLASC(H) 128.

The Cat is Back / Circular Emotion / Easy / When the Dreams Come / Night Fall / How Far Can You Fly? / Alex*. 52:26.*

Flores, p; Pavan, b; Bruno Marini, b cl, bari s*; Valerio Abeni, d. Mar. 30, 1987 & Sept. 23, 2003, Verona, Italy.

2) MARIO RAJA/MARVI LA SPINA/ BRUNO TOMMASO, LIGHEA, SPLASC(H) 799.

Vincenza Lopis / E & E / Erice / Carrittera / Lan Quan Li Jorn / Danza Salemi* / Cantastorie* / Jolla* / Inner Visions* / Scogli / Ninna Nanna / Soundless Words* / Estampie / Lontano*. 69:59.*

Raja, ts*, ss; La Spina, p; Tommaso, b. Apr. 23-24, Rome, Italy.

Swinging the Modern Mainstream, **(1)** features a clarion quartet, led by piano and bass, that feels comfortable interlacing Chamber Jazz with Bebop-influenced ideas. Bassist Giko Pavan possesses a lyrical spirit that he wraps up in the passions of the moment. By altering his pitch slightly in both directions, he's able to evince emotional flavors, such as anxiety, dauntlessness, forbearance and fury. Pavan's solos stand out like arias that have been personified to capture a specific message. Pianist Luca Flores, as the foundation of the ensemble, paints a colorful picture. While his harmonic choices constitute pleasurable sequences, it's just the right contrast to round out the quartet's mission. Similarly, Bruno Marini adds an edge to the session on bass clarinet and baritone saxophone, while drummer Valerio Abeni fills out the smoother rhythmic foundation.

With bowed bass on the title track, Pavan soars gently to open. As he switches to pizzicato and stands by Flores' side, the bassist increases the piece's anxiety level. On cue, Marini enters with a lengthy statement of mourning and despair. Since the piece has no meter, Abeni fills with various textures that depict floating on air. Other tracks swing with a quirky attitude that reminds us that this quartet's music refuses to be tied down. Creative and wide open to new ideas, Flores and Pavan lead a quartet that expresses Modern Jazz as an extension of both the classical tradition and the popular art form.

(2) features light, whispered melodies from soprano saxophonist Mario Raja. On both tenor and soprano, he carries a lyrical message that sings Mediterranean tales of adventure. The trio's program of original compositions drives with impressions of varying scenes. The session's unifying factor, a melodic soprano aria, provides suitable substance for impressionism. While the artists are Italian, their music swallows up specific elements from all around the Mediterranean Sea. Solemn Arabic majesty stands side by side with