

syncopations beloved by fans of this style. The pianist-leader has a great band, held together by the gifted Gress (whose work in Fred Hersch's trio has conferred upon him just the right experience for this kind of gig). Smith is a very tasteful player, given to accents similar to those of Michael Sarin but in a more understated style. And of course Liebman lifts up every session he's on, playing with both taste and fire (I'm particularly fond of the bouncing unison he shares with Kane on "Stealth Plan").

The tasteful lilt of "Moon and Shadows" again conjures up Hersch, and is really a model of how good a mainstream trio can be, not so much exploring linear extension as moving in tandem with a fascinating three-way conversation revealing new details on each listen. Though the group never cranks up the volume or lays it on tastelessly (though they get pretty raucous for the apart-at-the-seams swing of "Revenge of the Wally Dug"), they sound best to me on the more busy pieces. Instead of the impressionistic but unmemorable "Catching Threads," I'll take the hyper-tricky, almost George Russell-ish head on "Crypto-Zoology"—with a great duo section for Liebman's soprano and Smith—or Kane's shifting rhythms and quick-moving imagination on "Winter Rose" and "Unified Fields." Fine stuff overall.

From the excellent new Smalls imprint comes a fine document of New York's late night mainstream scene. The late pianist Hewitt (3) takes his time, following his own quirky muse—which to me bears some similarities to Mal Waldron (though there are hints of Tommy Flanagan as well)—just as he did on his other two Smalls releases. Joined by an excellent group of players, especially tenorist Byars, Hewitt expertly paces this complete set of standards. He can lay it down thick but also prod his mates with unexpected chordal jabs. For the most part it's pleasant but unassuming music, with fours and solos all around and no real desire to push any boundaries. Hewitt's band is certainly a good one—despite my preference for Byars' long legato journeys, each player contributes estimably—but they don't have the same idiosyncrasy Hewitt does. Hear this especially on the languorous "Blue Gardenia" (where his unexpected comping eggs the saxophonists on). His heart, however, was really in the brisk Hard Bop romps like Bud Powell's great "Oblivion" and Diz's "Manteca." His playing is fascinating at times: space opens up at odd junctures, but is quickly followed by hectic oblique runs. In this company, then, Hewitt's voice can't quite carry the day. But one is still left with fine, torch-carrying small group Jazz.

The wonderfully talented Lynch seems perfectly suited to Latin Jazz explorations (4). A vigorous and energetic soloist, he is an effective communicator. However, as a writer and bandleader he's also a thoughtful arranger and micro-manager of details (here particularly the rhythmic ones). His new band is a truly crack unit and Bowen is a great foil for Lynch, with a more lusty kind of expression that nonetheless reveals a deep har-



Brian Lynch by Mark Ladenson

monic complexity. I certainly prefer the tunes when the band plays flat out. But at the same time, it's hard not to be won over by sultry numbers like R. Lopez's "La Sitiera" (where Perdomo's playing shines) or by dark meditations like "J.B.'s Dilemma" (where the complex interaction between Quinero and Simpson, who thankfully are granted several feature spots across this disc, serves to inspire the horns and to launch Perdomo as if out of a cannon). On occasion, Lynch gives in to his abiding love for classic Hard Bop, as on "Liberated Brother" (which could be on a vintage Horace Silver platter). But in general, the Latin flavor is applied generously. The one real knock I have is that, as with a lot of records these days, it's way too long. And with dense tunes like these—particularly "Rumbera"—the concentration can flag in a single setting. But it's fine stuff overall, and must be quite good live.

Jason Bivins

## ERIC ALEXANDER & VINCENT HERRING, THE BATTLE - LIVE AT SMOKE, HIGHNOTE 7137.

*Blues Up and Down / Road Song / Firm Roots / Ritual Dance / Shirley's Song / Eleven Years.* 60:33.

Alexander, ts; Herring, as; Mike LeDonne, p; John Webber, b; Carl Allen, d. 4/1-2/05, NYC, NY.

Sure it's retro to have two saxophonists fronting a quintet and blowing toe to toe on the Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt oldie "Blues Up and Down." But when the horns are Eric Alexander and Vincent Herring fronting an idiomatically swinging rhythm section, no one should mind too much—they'll be having too good of a time. Taken from a couple of nights at New York's Smoke Jazz club, Alexander, Herring, and company start out with classic Bop, then extend the group sound with fresh idiomatic originals by pianist Mike LeDonne and drummer Carl Allen.