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Cool Cleveland Sounds

Kassaba Zones

According to the promotional materials, Kassaba is a "novel quartet featuring piano, bass, saxophones and numerous unusual percussion instruments from many different nations..." Sounds interesting. What's novel about it? Being there really is nothing new under the sun, I wouldn't go so far as to use "novel" to describe Kassaba, however, what is unusual about this group is their switching from one instrument to another during performance, for instance, pianist and composer Greg Slawson will move from his piano to claves. Pianist Candice Lee will move from woodblock to bongos to piano. Bassist Eric Hoseman plays numerous percussion instruments in addition to bass, as does saxophonist Mark Boich. So we have a group of musicians playing "musical instruments", if you will, no pun intended.

The best thing about Kassaba's music is it defies categorization. This music is a fusion of many influences and genres, but it is not "fusion"; there is improvisation and non-melodic, atonal meandering, yet it is not strictly jazz; classical elements fortify the compositional underpinnings, yet this is not classical music in the purest sense...sprinkle in world music and percussive influences and voila...you get music that is confoundedly un-pigeon-holeable. And that, dear readers, is, in itself, an accomplishment. And it is this very thing which gives Kassaba's music its freshness and whimsy. However, this is also serious music by highly trained musicians, all graduates of fine music schools. The academic and intellectual flavor of Kassaba's music is just the type of confection savored by the musical intelligentsia.

These observations come from listening to Kassaba's CD *Zones*, without the added benefit of seeing them perform live and this is a band that should definitely be seen as well as heard. Additionally, *Zones* was recorded over two years ago, and a lot of artistic growth can happen in two years, especially with musicians this skilled and ambitious.

I wholeheartedly recommend *Zones* to appreciators of music who like surprises and have adventurous, open minds. See Kassaba live for a real treat as they shake up the traditional notions of ensemble performance. **from *Cool Cleveland* contributor Laura Varcho lauraevarcho@yahoo.com**

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