

Vince Lewis



BETTER THAN EVER: THE VINCE LEWIS TRIO. 2006. Jim Martin Productions. P. O. Box 152, St. Albans, WV 25177. *Too Marvelous for Words, On Green Dolphin Street, Sue's Waltz, Only Trust Your Heart, The Preacher, My Romance, It Might as Well be Spring, Namely You, Here's That Rainy Day, Shiny Stockings, Jitterbug Waltz, I've Never Been in Love Before.*
PERSONNEL: Vince Lewis and Jim Martin, guitars; Rick Justice, drums.

By Bob Gish

Old friends swing smooth and easy here. Vince Lewis, Rick Justice, and Jim Martin are long-time jazzers around Charleston, West Virginia, proving once again that jazz grows in fertile fields everywhere. Lewis writes the liner notes that serve both as reminiscence and autobiography, allowing the listener of this CD a glimpse into the cultural forces that fostered the Charleston jazz scene in the 1960's and 1970's.

Lewis was on the road for nearly twenty years but returned to his Southern roots in 2004 where he teamed up again with Justice and Martin — his one time guitar teacher, and now the group's producer. (There's more than one famous Martin and Lewis friendship!) The trio now plays regularly at Bill Sohovich's restaurant in Charleston. And if this CD is true in its testimony, and it is, the music is indeed "Better Than Ever."

Part of the ease of this production is reflected in the first-take, two-day time frame of the recording. The tunes are standards. The arrangements are mellow. "Namely You", "My Romance", and "Here's That Rainy Day" are this listener's favorites, offering everything there is that these beautiful songs have to offer — especially the Latin, sparse but satisfying octave rendering of "Rainy Day". "Sue's Waltz" is another winner with all the charm and hospitality and the most cordial of southern belles. It's a tune you might have heard before but has all the excitement and expectation like a first meeting. "Jitterbug Waltz" is an even more familiar tune; a fine showcase for both Lewis' and Martin's flawless technique. It would be futile to compare Lewis to either Joe Pass or George Van Epps. Similarities are strong but so is Lewis' unique, liquid ways with chord melody.

"Shiny Stockings" is as mellifluous here as ever heard before, evoking the mood and themes of Ella Fitzgerald's rather surprising lyrics in the most vibrant way. "It Might as Well be Spring" is a playful, up-beat reaffirmation that things do come around again and two guitars and drums are as companionable as butterflies and flowers. "I've Never Been in Love Before" bursts forth like a spring lily, defined here by a single-line solo punctuated by great chord voicings and, as usual, great stick by Justice. The sense of these two tunes' lyrics is particularly fitting for the feel of the entire CD — old friends both rediscovering and discovering brand new avenues of their enduringly fresh and invigorating collaboration.