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Jack Mouse Group displays startling 'Range Of Motion'

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September 16, 2014
10:34 PM MST

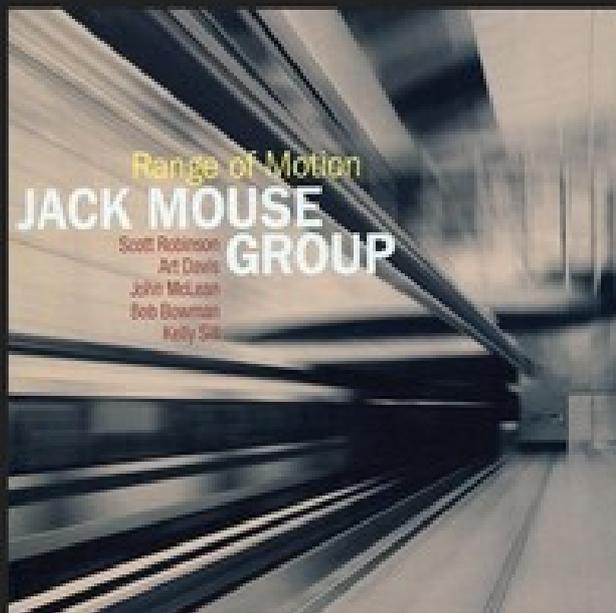


The WV Jazz Band and guest artist, drummer Jack Mouse, go to town on "Spain."
Jake Greenburg

Jack Mouse Group's "Range Of Motion" album • Recorded June 14-15, 2012 • Origin Records

Rating: ★★★★★

When the pushy melodic canyon of “LaPorta” comes on, it’s hard to believe this isn’t a cover of some famous post-bop groove artist many decades before. Then, you read on the back of [Jack Mouse](#)’s debut album, *Range Of Motion* on [Origin Records](#), that he composed and arranged all 10 tracks. Even more astounding.



John Bishop

The drummer’s probably picked up a lot of tricks in his illustrious career backing names like Clark Terry, Bill Evans, Stan Kenton, [Karrin Allyson](#), Rufus Reid, Bobby Broom, and on and on. The former featured soloist with the Falconaires, the U.S. Air Force Academy’s official jazz ensemble, and the [Janice Borla Group](#), Mouse’s credentials show on every track.

Also a frequent contributor to all the major drumming magazines, clinician, and educator, Mouse gathered five stellar, like-minded sidemen with him to flesh out his original thoughts, heavy on the horns in many cases: saxophonist/flutist Scott Robinson, trumpeter/flugelhornist Art Davis, bassists Bob Bowman and Kelly Sill, and guitarist John McLean.

While “LaPorta” (written in honor of mentor John LaPorta) grooves on a catchy series of melodic trips, “Hip Check” (inspired by a roughhousing Boston Bruins hockey player) gives Davis on the horn and bassist Bowman plenty of room to cut a wide swath. When the horn crashes and wails, it’s sweet, greasy nectar.

“The Breezeling,” on the other hand, threatens to go the route of forgettable smooth jazz background mood music — fairly floating along on a Disney fairy ride through ambling wildlife (that flute and guitar). After about two minutes of this, it’s time to check out of the Magic Kingdom. The warmly lit tones of the horn doesn’t lift the halfway house to retirement much. “Picture Peter Gunn hanging out at his favorite club, Mother’s. My humble tip of the hat to Henry Mancini, originally composed for a now ill-fated film score,” Mouse wrote of the song in his liner notes. That explains a lot.

It’s when Mouse leads his sextet through a series of hard-driving, off-syncopated rhythms — bring on the “Manne-rism!” (for blues stylist Shelly Manne) — that this album comes alive. More of the hunt and drive of the separatist instrumentation slamming into the whole. The solos on this bandit fly number are legit.

Jack Mouse is more of a point of origin for the other swinging musicians, than a typical jazz leader chewing up the scenery to prove a point.

He's not up front charging up a storm. Rather, he's settling down and setting the table for his horn section to divvy up the feast or famine, and settling back after triggering the bassist and guitarist to gorge on backbeats and polyrhythms.

It's tempting to dismiss the slower ballads on this album — until "Winterset" happens. "Winterset" is a wonderful study in slow-building stamina, gracious hooks, and voluminous background caucuses. Mouse runs the house here, driving the burning contemplation from set to set, musician to musician, in a jazz-turned-avant-garde detour. The balance of what sounds like a reverberating guitar and a haunting turn of trumpet halfway through exemplifies the timeless shine of most of these original pieces.

The Jack Mouse Group's "Range Of Motion" is in the specialty of the solos and the bandleader's underlying dictates of mood and movement. The group tends to soar when climbing purposefully on renegotiated rhythms, in a well-timed loop.

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