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Volume III
Willie Jones III (WJ3)
by Russ Musto

Drummers aren't well known for leading trio dates with piano and bass accompaniment - Roy Haynes the notable exception - but Willie Jones III is not your typical drummer. Jones, who cut his chops on the West Coast in the cooperative group Black/Note and recorded with Horace Silver's quintet, made a name for himself in New York as a member of Roy Hargrove's band, playing with a deep grooving swing that belied his youth. On his first two dates as a leader, Steve Davis, Greg Tardy and Hargrove. On his third outing Jones has chosen to show off his swing in the context of two threesomes, one featuring pianist Eric Reed and bassist Dwayne Burno and, on two tracks, with Willie Jones II (keys) and Mike Elizondo (bass).

Jones kicks off the set with a rhythmic reading of Cedar Walton's "Shoulders", playing with an unobtrusive but spirited swing behind Reed and Burno that recalls Billy Higgins' work with the composer's trio. Jones II and Elizondo are heard to good effect on a satisfying rendition of "Here's That Rainy Day", on which the leader demonstrates his impeccable brushwork. Reed and Burno return for the former's "The First Man", an easy swinger reminiscent of "Sweet and Lovely", on which the pianist delivers some moody Monkisms. The leader picks things up with his Latin rhythms on Dizzy's "Con Alma" - a vehicle for a lyrical Burno bass solo and more swinging Reed piano - and then keeps things moving on an uptempo performance of McCoy Tyner's "Inception" that features the drummer's crisp exchanges with the blazing Reed. Jones II and Elizondo return for a beautiful interpretation of "I Heard A Forest Praying", a rarely heard gem popularized by Johnny Mathis. Quincy Jones' "Wail Bait" finds Reed and Burno back, burning with a cool flame, fueled by Jones III's lively ride cymbal. The date concludes movingly with the spiritual "He Looked Beyond My Faults".

For more information, visit www.williejones3.com. Jones is at The Kitano Dec. 15th-16th with Eric Reed. See calendar.