

Masterpiece ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

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Willie Jones III

The Willie Jones III Sextet
Plays The Max Roach Songbook
Live At Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola

WJ3 1012

★★★★★



In order to do right by an icon of attack like Max Roach, authority needs to top your agenda. There are numerous repertory outfits that line their endeavors with precision and grace while leaving the ardor at home. That's not the case here. Jones is one of the most animated drummers on the New York scene, and the vehemence his band brings to hopped-up classics such as "Libra" and "Freedom Day" is front and center. Long story short, when they set up shop at Columbus Circle last January, they owned this stuff.

Roach's work with mid-sized groups often felt explosive. A simple press roll or cymbal crash could jump-start a series of actions that raised the roof. Jones strives to reignite that dynamic. George Russell's "Ezz-Thetic" kicks off the action with a fierce tempo that sets the pace for the entire program. From saxophonist Stacy Dillard's hard-bop squall to the boss' splashy rampage, it's all about verve. The theme of "Libra" has a permanent case of the jitters. When trumpeter Jeremy Pelt smears some long notes over the track's stormy rhythmic exchange, it underscores just how hard the band is hitting.

Things calm down on "Equipoise," but even the ballads sizzle on this date. Dillard's known for his lyricism as well as his bluster, and the track's soprano solo has almost as much romance and edge as the original (from Roach's underappreciated *Members Don't Git Weary*).

Perhaps the zenith of creative agitation comes from Eric Reed, who uses his solo on "Freedom Day" to stack line upon line like he's speed-shuffling a deck of cards. With bassist Dezron Douglas sprinting along, the pianist starts his romp by granting his phrases plenty of room, only to careen towards a spot that gives the term "jumble" a good name—a whirlwind of counterpoint that must have had the audience on the edge of their seats. It's an apt exemplar of this band's essence: They pounce on every idea that the music presents, and bring these vibrant pieces to life again.

—Jim Macnie

Plays The Max Roach Songbook: Ezz-Thetic; Libra; Equipoise; Freedom Day; Mr. X; To Lady; I Get A Kick Out Of You/Shirley.

Personnel: Willie Jones III, drums; Stacy Dillard, tenor, soprano (3) saxophones; Eric Reed, piano; Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; Steve Davis, trombone; Dezron Douglas, bass.

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