

Review - JONATHAN WIDRAN - December 2020



"Who says all the best, boldest and most badass new jazz groups come from NYC? Just when our tired spirits and hopeful ears are in critical need, the most alternately incendiary/explosive, playfully swinging and lyrical/soulful trad jazz (with a little Latin twist) debut of early 2021 goes to The Grasso-Ravita Jazz Ensemble, a brilliant, rhythmically eclectic newly formed group down the road a few hours (Baltimore/DC area).

The spark that launched Jagged Spaces, a delightfully spent hour of the funkiest, wildest yet cool, intimate and caressing jazz you've heard in ages, was a single gig in March 2018, when two veteran sidemen - guitarist Skip Grasso and bassist Phil Ravita - first discussed their profound desire to do a project of original music. Acting on this intuitive moment, Ravita reached out and gathered a stellar group of likeminded composers and musicians, including saxophonist Benny Russell, pianist Greg Small (also a trumpeter on other gigs) and drummer Nuc Vega.

It was chemistry at first chord, melody, groove and listen. No telling if these nine freewheeling tracks - which roll amiably from the booming, hard swinging, feisty solo filled title track through the sultry, easy swaying "Chasing Shadows" - were recorded live in the studio or digitally during the pandemic, but it's easy to visualize these guys giving each other gleeful knowing smiles every second, whether they're romping and rolling through the speedy, buoyant grooves of "Songhai," the snazzy, smoky blues jam "Blue Sunshine." dancing politely and elegantly through the waltz "Her Life Incomplete" or dipping into the romantic exotic lighthearted sizzle of "Latin for Leandro."