

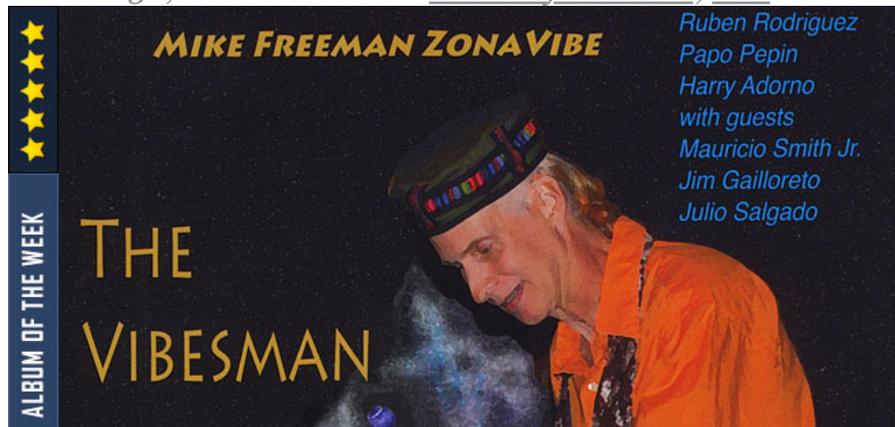


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## Mike Freeman Zona Vibe – The Vibesman

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**There are two exciting aspects to Mike “The Vibesman” Freeman; both are related to each other. But first: There is his elegant facility with the vibraphone. His is a singular voice with an easy, languid swing that is born of a wide-eyed joy at the bright aspects of life, which is to say his is a sun-splashed voice.**

He has learned well from the vibraphone masters who came before him, especially Cal Tjader. Freeman graduates almost naturally towards the elements of Afro Caribbean music with regard to harmony and rhythm and there is even an Afro Brazilian accent that comes to the fore every now and then. Using a four mallet approach, Freeman is able to create a sweeping palette of colours, with chordal changes that are made of fresh, subtle hues related to warm, tropical colours. His lines are awash with foamy aspects of harmonic progression and they rise and fall in dramatic arcs—almost as if his music arose from a tidal current that kept lapping on a mystical shore, basking in the heat of a blazing sun.

On *The Vibesman* Mike Freeman leads his band ZonaVibe with quiet authority, creating harmonic and rhythmic cartwheels in the air with the burnished sound of both vibraphone and marimba. His melodies are delightful and tumble off his mallets in interminable, viscous linear flows that sway sophisticatedly as they dodge the root notes of chords that constantly surprise. “Jigsaw Puzzle” is one of the finest charts on his record and is a fine example of his dexterity with harmony. It is a musical adventure with an exciting graphic feel to it. The melody is comprised of short, looping lines that open a melodic thought, whirl and twirl in the heated air before returning to close the loop with just a slight suggestion of the original musical thought. In closing that first

loop, another is formed with the melody carving the air in a new looping form, suggesting a new aspect of the original musical thought. With layer upon layer of melody flowing in this manner a truly interesting approach to melody is formed. This is coupled with risqué harmonies and breathtaking rhythmic progressions as Freeman unfolds an altogether original musical sensibility.

This approach—a fine mixture of the dusty shuffle of the Afro Caribbean soundscape and a verdant reflection of the emotional elements of the lush Brazilian musical topography—breeds an interestingly fresh compositional style. This might suggest that Freeman’s compositions are cluttered with elements of rhythm fighting for attention. Quite the contrary; Freeman’s personality, as may be divined from his music, is one that is languid, which is why his songs are spare and move in a manner that suggests the limpid, almost nonchalant swagger of native Caribbean or Brazilian on a morning constitutional under a friendly sun. Fortunately this sun also heats and so does the music of Mike Freeman. This element is built in to the arrangements reserved for the horns and woodwinds, which cut themselves off from what might be their original cool sound, in favour of hot notes in their soli. And then there is the scorching heat that comes from the percussion: the congas, timbales and other assorted percussion. Building all of these elements into his compositions gives Freeman the freedom to experiment with new approaches towards melodies that come from polar opposites: the “cool” of the vibes and the “heat” of everything else.

This is a fine record, from which can be clearly discerned that a bright musical star is on the rise: that of Mike Freeman. The vibraphone artist can also count on the superior talents of some of the finest accompanists—especially his percussion colourists—who make him sound incredibly good. The “Vibe Descarga” which closes out the set is a fine example of how well these musicians jive, but most of all what a stellar artist Mike Freeman is.

**Tracks:** Jigsaw Puzzle; Drifting; Lucky 7; So Long, Just Walking By; Vibe Descarga; Blue; Too Groovy; MongoMarley; Sahara Sunrise; Trolley Car; Vibe Descarga Y Voz.

**Personnel:** Mike Freeman: vibraphone, marimba, kalimba, wood flute, minor percussion; Rubén Rodríguez: bass; Papo Pepín: congas, bongó, campana, percussion; Harry Adorno: timbales; Mauricio Smith Jr.: flute, coro; Jim Gailloreto: tenor saxophone; Julio Salgado: lead vocal, coro.

**Mike Freeman – Official Website:** [www.jazzvibe.com](http://www.jazzvibe.com)

**Label:** VOF Recordings

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