



Mike Freeman ZonaVibe: The Vibesman (2012)

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The sound of the vibraphone glows—a ringing and sustained sonic luminescence. Current masters of the instrument include Gary Burton, Joe Locke, Bobby Hutcherson, and the perhaps lesser-known but also masterful Mike Freeman.

With his percussion-soaked group ZonaVibe—that includes, besides the vibes, the sounds of marimba, and kalimba, congas, bongos, campana and timbales—Freeman stirs up a multicultural brew of vibrant optimism and Latin and world jazz grooves. Tenor sax and flute, steeped in an organized rhythmic clamor on the livelier numbers and a burbling percolation on the smoother tunes, front the ensemble on alternating tunes.

On previous recordings, Freeman has used the vibes and marimba as his main voices. He branches out here by including a wood flute and a kalimba (African thumb piano) in his arsenal on “Sahara Sunrise,” extending the reach of the world grooves in his music. “Drifting” brings a cool-flowing Brazilian vibe to the mix that flows around Mauricio Smith, Jr.’s flute work, and “Vibe Descarga” adds some Latin sauce to the set.

“Too Groovy,” which features Jim Gailloreto’s tenor saxophone, is based loosely on pianist Sergio Mendes’ “Groovy Samba,” and brings back the Brazilian tint. “MongoMarley” combines the mood of reggae master Bob Marley and Afro-Cuban percussionist Mongo Santamaria. “Blue” is a piece of gorgeous tranquility featuring Gailloreto’s clear-toned tenor sax and Freeman’s hopeful vibraphone resonance.

The Vibesman closes with “Vibe Descarga Y Voz,” some party-time salsa featuring Julio Salgado on vocals, dancing off into the night and nicely wrapping up and ebullient and often rousing set.

Personnel: Mike Freeman: vibraphone, marimba, kalimba, wood flute, minor percussion; Ruben Rodriguez: bass; Papo Pepin: congas, bongo, campana, percussion; Harry Adorno: timbales; Mauricio Smith, Jr.: flute, coro; Jim Gailloreto: tenor saxophone; Julio Salgado: vocal and coro (11).

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