

# Randy Brecker

## Reviews

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### REVIEWS OF "THE BRECKER BROTHERS BAND REUNION"

#### **RANDY BRECKER/Brecker Brothers Band Reunion \*\*\*\*\* (5 stars)**

By Mark Gilbert, Jazz Journal, December 2013

What's remarkable here, as so often, is Brecker's compositional genius, and the energy and sheer hard work that must go into these magnificent edifices of aural architecture, viz. the labyrinthine paths described by the various sections and transitions of *First Tune*, from full-on Brownian funk and screaming rock, to a cool samba sequence for solos. Also remarkable is the power of the soloists on this opening track, not the least Mike Stern, who seems to play some new lines and inject a burning new vitality into familiar ones. Brecker has his formulae too, no doubt, but as a soloist the lines have lost none of their grace and intelligence and the signature harmonic and melodic intelligence of his compositions, never ceases to intrigue and amaze. George Whitty, producing mastermind, has a witty (!) Moogish solo on *First Tune*, which perhaps underlines the retrospective dimension of this set.

Followers will recognize in the personnel a pantheon of Brecker Brothers names going back a bit. It's not complete, but old hands Sanborn and Lee reach back nearly four decades. Randy explains that the original BB Band (1975) was going to be the Randy Brecker Band but producer Steve Backer said "If you call this band the Brecker Brothers, I'll sign you tomorrow." The Randy/BB dichotomy resurfaces here, and rightly, since mostly in the BB and here entirely Randy did the writing and was far away the major writing force.

Randy's seminal brother Mike is sadly no more, and here Mrs R. Brecker, Ada Rovatti, steps in to do a fine job. The other saxophonist, Sanborn soloing on the Sidewinder-ish *The Dipshit*, has a more guttural tone than of old – interesting: mouthpiece or maturity? Guitarist Rogers is casually stunning here. And so it unfolds – a parade of outstanding musicality and invention.

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#### **RANDY BRECKER/Brecker Brothers Band Reunion**

By Chris Spector, MIDWEST RECORD, September 12, 2013

RANDY BRECKER/Brecker Brothers Band Reunion: In which we find Randy bringing himself full circle to where he started out from before the jumping off point changed. Originally starting his career with a solo record that morphed into a Brothers record, Randy was assembling a band for some dates when he realized that everyone he was contacting passed through his portals at one point or another when the light bulb went off. It was time for some electrojazzfunk to be played in a way to show the kids how it's done. While the combined age

of the band might be a million, they play with no dust on them and in high octane style. With an energy level that winds it back some 40 years (especially when some of those tunes are revisited on the DVD portion of this set), Brecker and his pals are delivering the goods like it's back in the day. This is about as funky as white boys can get. A winner.

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## **REVIEWS OF "NIGHT IN CALISIA"**

### **Randy Brecker: Night in Calisia (2013)**

By NICHOLAS F. MONDELLO, All About Jazz, Published: September 28, 2013

The waters of history significantly bathe Kalisz, Poland's oldest city. Specifically, they source back when Kalisz was an important stop on the Amber Road to Rome. Historical streams of another type also run broadly through this exuberantly satisfying recording offered by the triumvirate of trumpeter, Randy Brecker, pianist/composer Wlodek Pawlik, and the hometown Kalisz Philharmonic.

This is a sprawling, beautiful and inspiring performance which, through Pawlik's effusive musical pageantry, Brecker's outstanding playing, and the orchestra's hometown fervor, appropriately helped the ancient town celebrate its 1850th anniversary. And, they did it magnificently.

Stylistically, Pawlik's writing deploys vibrant, elegantly refined melodies and up-tempo modal underscores that are richly orchestrated. His well-established classical roots seethe through each of the selections. The beautiful slower pieces, Satie-like, are lush and, like the others here, generously free Brecker to paint his own superb sound-pictures. The musical balancing act of soloist with orchestra is ideal throughout.

Randy Brecker, whose stellar resume spans decades, genres, and recordings with other fine European orchestras, is supremely on his game here—better than ever—playing with a gorgeous, warm sound, ebullient spirit, and animated creativity. An abundance of jazz joy is evident in his longer ribbon-like lines and his hard bop style is unfettered yet well in musical synch with Pawlik's invigorating and spirited background platforms.

Under conductor Adam Kloczek, the Kalisz Philharmonic gratefully buys in to the celebration, performing with significant zest, never allowing things to bog down or to sabotage the festive nature of the event. The rhythm section, with Pawlik's keyboard leading the way, drives this caravan quite well.

Perhaps the only possible criticism here—and it's a nitpick and not even a musical one: the liner notes were apparently run through a translation device. That notwithstanding, there's nothing lost in translation or fossilized in amber about this bravura performance. It's a gem.

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### **Randy Brecker / Wlodek Pawlik – Night In Calisia (2012)**

By Adam Baruch, MONDAY, JANUARY 28, 2013

This is the second album on which the legendary American trumpeter Randy Brecker cooperates with Polish Jazz pianist / composer Wlodek Pawlik, performing a Jazz suite composed by Pawlik. Their previous cooperation resulted in the album "Tykocin Jazz Suite", which was very warmly received by critics and audiences alike. This time they perform the "Night In Calisia" suite, which was commissioned by the Polish City of Kalisz to commemorate its 1850 Anniversary. The music is performed by Brecker, a piano trio led by Pawlik with bassist Pawel Panta and drummer Cezary Konrad and the Kalisz Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Adam Klocek. The suite is sub-divided into six sections, which together provide a continuous flow of integrated music.

The suite is based on several melodic themes, which reappear throughout the sections, with some passages performed by the orchestra and others featuring the piano trio and the trumpeter. There are several extended solos, all executed perfectly as expected from such high-class musicians. The instrumentation and arrangements balance beautifully between the Jazz undercurrent and the orchestral parts, with naturally tend to sound more Classical in nature. The music is wonderfully lyrical and melodic, tranquil and serene most of the time, simply stroking the listener's attention note by note. Brecker plays simply outstanding, with exceptional clarity and stability, which is extremely difficult. Pawlik fills the space with the melodic motifs, always attentive and gentle. The bassist displays sheer virtuosic qualities and a warm sound of rare beauty and the veteran drummer keeps time, when keeping time is needed and gently strokes the set during the more atmospheric passages. This is pure bliss.

I suppose some listeners and Jazz connoisseurs might find this music to be slightly "sugary" at times. Well, perhaps so, but it certainly does not bother me at all. This is supposed to be a melodic, Jazz oriented amalgam of cross-genre explorations, well framed within the Classical tradition as well as the Jazz heritage. Pawlik is obviously a Master of his trade, which anybody listening to this recording must admit fair and square. There is a plentitude of wonderful Jazz / Classical interplays, which are intelligent, interesting and entertaining. The artistry involved both in the composition as well as the execution of this music is definitely praiseworthy.

This album is highly recommended to listeners, who love the proximity of Jazz and contemporary Classical music, and who will find this work delicious at all times. Pawlik confirms his position as a major force on the Polish Jazz scene and listening to Brecker's trumpet is always a pleasure. Well done!

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## **REVIEWS OF "THE BRECKER BROS. - THE COMPLETE ARISTA ALBUMS COLLECTION"**

**The Brecker Brothers: The Brecker Bros. - The Complete Arista Albums Collection**

By JOHN KELMAN, Published: December 14, 2012

Some snippets of a 9 page review:

....But the core strengths of the band—the detailed, complex instrumental charts written largely by the two brothers (Randy first; Michael's aptitude for writing came a little later), the exceptional chemistry of literally every incarnation; and the remarkable frontline simpatico shared by siblings Randy and Michael (and, when it was a three-piece horn section, altoist Sanborn, too)—made every record a winner, even if some of there were some inconsistencies and some albums were absolutely better than others.

.....what's most important is the music, and if one thing becomes absolutely crystal clear after digesting nearly six hours of vintage Brecker Brothers, it's just how important and influential both the group—and the many players who passed through its doors in its six years of life—would become. There's the occasional misstep to be found, but overall, this vintage soul-drenched, funkified and occasionally discofied collection of 59 songs on five studio and three live albums remains as fresh, invigorating and relevant today as it did nearly 37 years ago, when The Brecker Brothers' first incarnation, with Randy producing, stepped into New York's Secret Sound Studios to record an album that would forever change the landscape of jazz-rock fusion.

..... and if Michael ultimately emerged as the more influential player, it's a curiosity since his brother has, in the ensuing decades, proven an equally distinctive and diverse player, as comfortable in the modal burn setting of saxophonist Dave Liebman's Pendulum quintet, heard on the high-octane Mosaic Select 32: Pendulum Live at the Village Vanguard (Mosaic, 2008), as he is exploring the music of Brazil on the Grammy Award-winning Randy in Brasil (MAMA, 2008). But if Michael's ultimate reputation was already being made at this early stage, it should not be overlooked that it's brother Randy who produced the first record and contributed the majority of the music on The Brecker Bros., including some—along with "Skunk Funk" and "Sponge," the incendiary "Rocks"—that have joined the pantheon of modern-day classics.

...With Michael Brecker now gone, and a Brecker Brothers tribute taken place in 2012 that was hopefully recorded—featuring Randy, together with The Return of the Brecker Brothers' guitarist Mike Stern, drummer Rodney Holmes, bassist Will Lee, keyboardist-producer George Whitty (another '90s-era Brecker Bros. alum), saxophonist Ada Rovatti and vocalist/keyboardist Oli Rockberger—Legacy's The Complete Arista Albums Collection couldn't come at a more appropriate time.

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## **REVIEWS OF "NOSTALGIC JOURNEY: TYKOCIN JAZZ SUITE"**

**Randy Brecker - Nostalgic Journey: Tykocin Jazz Suite (The Music of Wlodek Pawlik) - Summit**

*Another fine combination of a jazz soloist backed by orchestra, band or strings*

Published on September 12, 2009

(Randy Brecker, trumpet; Wlodek Pawlik Trio, with Pawei Panita, doublebass & Cezary Konrad, drums; The Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic of Bialystok/Marcin Malecz-Niesiolowski, cond.)

Coming right after auditioning the new Tribute to Oscar Peterson, this is another fine combination of a jazz soloist backed by orchestra, band or strings. In fact this one reminds me even more of my personal favorite - Stan Getz' Focus.

Nostalgic Journey has an unusual back story. Trumpeter Randy Brecker met pianist Pawlik in Poland in 1994. Later, when Randy's brother Michael was diagnosed with leukemia, the family began looking for eastern European donors, who were believed to be the best match, and recontacted Pawlik. They traced the Brecker family antecedents to a Polish area known as Tykocin.

Wlodek Pawlik has been described as the Oscar Peterson of classical music or the Vladimir Horowitz of jazz and he is also a distinguished composer. He composed the Tykocin Jazz Suite in honor of the Brecker family's discovery. It has a three-movement introduction and six separate sections. Pawlik, a strongly religious man, quotes excerpts from some of David's Psalms in the notes, which for him express the inexpressible context of the musical meeting. Thankfully (for me at least) the work itself is entirely instrumental. The piece is varied, highly melodic, and full of exciting solos for both trumpet and piano. The balance of the jazz trio/quartet against the orchestra is handled beautifully. The orchestra is top flight, having been named the State Philharmonic for Poland, and an institution of national culture. Randy's previous album was Randy in Brasil, and this time it's Randy in Poland, achieving one of the finest mixes of jazz and classical one could hear.

### **- John Henry, Audiophile Audition**

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### **Brecker's journey home**

Published: Sun, Sep. 13, 2009

In searching for a stem cell donor when doctors diagnosed saxophonist Michael Brecker with myelodysplastic syndrome in 2005, the Brecker family found its maternal roots in Tykocin, Poland. "Nostalgic Journey: Tykocin Jazz Suite" (Summit) reflects on that bittersweet journey.

Subtitled "The Music of Wlodek Pawlik," it features trumpeter Randy Brecker, the late saxophonist's older brother, with pianist and composer Pawlik's trio and the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic of Bialystok, Poland, conducted by Marcin Nalecz-Niesiolowski. Pawlik uses the orchestra sparingly with Brecker and avoids compromising the jazz content.

However, Brecker does not play on the three-movement "Introduction," the minor-key second movement of which is rich in ominous, brooding strings. A similar, seemingly inherent Polish vibe inhabits "Magic Seven" before the track evolves into a Weather Report-like groove with lots of ensemble rhythmic accents and an aggressive, running, hard bop solo by Brecker. "Let's All Go to Heaven," a brighter, uplifting track, is another highlight

as Brecker offers rewarding phrases and a buoyant mood.

Pawlik's trio, which includes bassist Pawel Panita and drummer Cezary Konrad, is a versatile unit that covers the waterfront from the pianist's classical influences to Keith Jarrett- and McCoy Tyner-like technique. Overall, this is a solid set with plenty of emotional *raison d'être* and expression, hints of Eastern European musical mystique and four strong, motivated soloists.

- Owen Cordle, *The News & Observer*

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### **Nostalgic Journey: Tykocin Jazz Suite**

Trumpeter Randy Brecker's jazz credentials are of the highest order. The Brecker Brothers, the group he co-led with younger brother/saxophonist Michael, was one of the most successful jazz/funk/fusion groups of the 1970s and '80s. But jazz snobbery/elitism never ran in the family. Brecker has played and recorded with seemingly everybody, from the original Blood, Sweat and Tears on its debut, *Child is Father to the Man* (Columbia Records, 1968), to albums by Bruce Springsteen, Lou Reed, Dire Straits and Aerosmith.

With a funk/fusion background and lots of work in the rock world, *Nostalgic Journey: Tykocin Jazz Suite*, a classical-leaning "jazz with strings" outing, is something of a surprise.

The story of Michael Brecker's tragic and untimely death in 2007 from leukemia, and the search for a blood marrow donor, led to tracing the Brecker family roots to Poland's Tykocin area. The ancestral search was aided by Polish pianist/composer Wlodek Pawlik, whom Randy met in Germany in 1994 when Pawlik played with the Western Jazz Quartet. That meeting-and the subsequent quest for Brecker bloodlines-ultimately led to Pawlik's writing on this superb meeting of classical and jazz worlds.

Though Brecker's name is the big one-profile-wise and physically, on the CD cover-the smaller lettering beneath his name states "The Music of Wlodek Pawlik." This suite, where Brecker blows with clean precision in front of Pawlik's trio and the Symphony Orchestra of Bialystok's Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic, feels and sounds like serious art, more so than any number of great "jazz with strings" recordings on the shelf. It's less jazzy and more attuned to the classical side than Charlie Parker with *Strings* (Verve Records, 1950), the grandfather of the genre; Paul Desmond's *Desmond Blue* (RCA Victor, 1961); or Art Pepper's *Winter Moon* (Galaxy/OJC, 1980).

The journey begins with a three part introduction, with the unaccompanied Pawlik painting delicate teardrops on "Movement 1." He is joined by a subtle backdrop of strings on the inward "Movement 2," leading into an enlivened, driving symphonic sound on "Movement 3."

Brecker and Pawlik's trio mates, bassist Pawel Panita and drummer Cezary Konrad, make their appearance on the title cut, a beautiful tune that showcases Brecker's striking tone and deft navigation of the composition, as well as Pawlik's intricate pianism and tight trio interplay.

The upbeat "Let's All go to Heaven" possesses the jazziest mood of the set, with the trio and Brecker sounding especially inspired and in the groove. "No Words," preceded by another gorgeous piano intro, is a soft ballad, the sort that Chet Baker was so good at delivering. Brecker does his own tangy, heartfelt delivery, backed by just the right subtle touch of string accompaniment, with a searching piano solo slipped in the middle. "Magic Seven" marries classical grandeur with jazz guts and fire, and "Blue Rain" gets into a jazz groove on the upbeat closing to this musical journey.

Nostalgic Journey: Tykocin Jazz Suite is a magnificent CD that presents both a new side to Randy Brecker and a fine introduction to Wlodek Pawlik.

**- Dan McClenaghan, All About Jazz**

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### **Randy Brecker, Nostalgic Journey: Tykocin Jazz Suite (Summit Records)**

Three words come to mind after a listen to trumpeter Randy Brecker's latest project: stunning, poignant, breathtaking. This is a homecoming project of great importance. Last summer, Brecker made an emotional journey to Tykocin, the area in Poland where his grandfather lived before emigrating to the United States. It was pinpointed when Randy and other family members were looking for eastern European bone marrow donors who might be a match for his brother Michael, two years before the saxophonist lost his battle with a very rare form of leukemia.

Polish composer and pianist Wlodek Pawlik wrote this homecoming suite, and performed it with Brecker and the Symphony Orchestra of the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic in Bialystok, Poland. The blend of classical orchestra and jazz quartet is seamless and feels natural. Highlights: Brecker's intense soloing on "Nostalgic Journey," "Let's All Go to Heaven," "Magic Seven" and "Blue Rain" - and his strong musical empathy with Pawlik's excellent trio. This one may go down as one of the finest and most important works in Brecker's extensive discography.

**-Ken Franckling**

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## **REVIEWS OF "SOME SKUNK FUNK"**

"Some Skunk Funk catches the brothers as soloists with the suave and respected WDR Big Band Köln. Randy wrote eight of the 10 tunes - Michael wrote the other two - for this gig, recorded live in November 2003. The 10 cuts were arranged by Vince Mendoza, who lends a pop seasoning without compromising the basic jazz bouillabaisse. The tunes are snappy, and the WDR band provides a large embrace." \*\*\*1/2

**- Philadelphia Inquirer**

"Some Skunk Funk is live funky jazz from a simply amazing band, with big band

augmentation. The original Brecker brothers songs are fresh yet familiar. Everyone loves this kind of funky set. For this style of music - deep pocketed, funky jazz - there's simply no assemblage of musicians who could do a better job. These seasoned professionals have played together before and share a chemistry that is unmatched. Skunky and funky!"

**- Jazz Improv Magazine**

"In this blistering live performance from Leverkusen in 2003, trumpet player and composer Randy Brecker hauled his tenor star brother Michael and American musicians Jim Beard, Peter Erskine and Will Lee (of Paul Shafer's TV band for David Letterman) to play some difficult charts that would leave lesser bands gasping for air and tangled up in their own fingers and music stands. (The title opener, for instance.) As 21st century jazz goes, it isn't much different from the most challenging orchestral jazz of the late 20th century, but the playing on this disc is so remarkable it sounds fresh and even avant anyway." 3 1/2 stars

**- Buffalo News**

"The planets must have been in alignment for the Brecker Brothers opus, Some Skunk Funk...A hurricane of harmonic huffing and puffing, Some Skunk Funk captures jazz lightning in a bottle."

**- Virginian-Pilot**

"Leader Randy's work on 'Levitate' makes the listener wonder why he's not a household name like his brother. Vince Mendoza does an excellent job arranging the music, leading the band, and keeping the music cohesive during this raucous but well controlled gig. Listen to the music that has spawned a myriad of imitators; check out the real thing done right."

**- All About Jazz - LA**

"Trumpeter Randy Brecker and tenor saxophonist Michael Brecker take many fiery solos while also sounding warm on ballads. They are supported by a particularly strong rhythm section...the Breckers' solos are full of exciting moments."

**- All Music Guide**

"Some Skunk Funk is the two horn players matching soloing powers in a big band setting. The set came off very well, the duo are clearly impressive in their soloing abilities, and the band played to perfection. The possibilities these days with a big band are almost endless in the styles that are available to a musician. The duo do their best to explore those possibilities but remain true to big band tradition."

**- John Shelton Ivany Top 21**

"Simply put, the preponderance of this outing serves as a modern-day synopsis of classic Brecker Brothers fare, enlivened by punchy horn charts and the big band's in-your-face demeanor. Scorching solos by Randy, Michael, drummer Peter Erskine and others help cast an overall groove that consists of hyper-mode jazz, underscored by power, and fluidity. Moreover, the SACD format yields quite a bit of depth, clarity and separation to the radiant horns, brisk rhythms and tightly coordinated interplay."

**- Ejazznews.com**

"A 2003 kind of Brecker Brothers reunion that finds them in Germany in the company of some of their long time pals and cohorts. A big band take on some of the best meat on

their plate from their hey day, the brothers horns are hitting hard and often on this fun romp that recalls the best of the fusion days."

- **Midwestrecord.com**

"Randy Brecker leads authoritatively on trumpet, and provides the program with a running thread. His ballads are pure and simple, while his contemporary funk burns fiercely. The WDR Big Band, a pleasure to listen to in any setting, gives a typically winning performance, featuring stellar solo work and cohesive ensemble interplay."

- **AllAboutJazz.com**

"Randy (t) leads the charge with his brother Michael (sax) right next to him. It is like a reunion of their late 1970s efforts as the Brecker Brothers, especially on the title track and 'Strap-Hangin'.' But at this moment they are supported with the powerful WDR Big Band and guest soloists Will Lee (b), Peter Erskine (d) and Jim Beard (p). It is a great trip back!"

- **O's Place Jazz Newsletter**

## **REVIEWS OF "INTO THE SUN"**

The trumpeter/composer has long had an interest in a multitude of musics, and he investigates many of them- Brazilian, funk, mainstream, fusion, pop- on this impressive disc. Brazilian, via both sambas and bossa, is the overriding genre, with succulent melodies spotlight on "Buds," "Tijuca," "Just Between Us," et al. "The Sleaze Factor" has a dandy jazz/funk groove, "Gray Area" is appealingly edgy and fusion-like.

- **Downbeat**

Without a doubt trumpeter Randy Brecker has delivered one of the most creative recordings of this or any year. This is a very, very special outing for Brecker, and for those who hear it. Most remarkable is that, like a classic movie, the more often you listen to it, the more appealing it becomes as you discover the varying colors within.

- **Rapport Magazine**

Brecker sums up his affinity for Brazilian jazz on Into the Sun, a sumptuous collection of long-form works loaded with evocative, oblique melodies, sonorous arrangements, and brilliant bop-tinged solos.

- **Mark Holston, Jazzizz**

...Brecker was at his crisp, fiery best, playing dazzlingly fleet trumpet solos that soared as much emotionally as musically... Brecker positively soared and swooped with the grace of an osprey on flugelhorn...

- **George Kanzler, Star Ledger**

A fresh new release of Brazilian-styled compositions...remarkable sensitive trumpet work...fabulous flugelhorn playing. This release has definitely got to be the finest of his career...

- **Jazz Trumpet Journal**

Brecker creates a smooth jazz sound that's enlivened by earthy rhythms, electronic

swagger, and a snappy complexity.

- **The Philadelphia Inquirer**

## **QUOTES**

His crisp, clean trumpet sound and decidedly melodic approach combined to offer an entirely delightful musical expression that could well serve as a beacon for contemporary jazz.

- **Los Angeles Times**

Indeed, Brecker's sonic swirls, while sweeping up a babbling cross-section of current argots and accents, sparkle with savvy sophistication and ebullient joie de vivre ....stiletto sharp articulations.... (from) Brecker's burnished trumpet.

- **Chuck Berg, Jazztimes**

The potential In The Idiom found Randy in a headlong foray into more mainstream jazz. The forward leaning R. Brecker's latest project. Toe To Toe is a fine example of how the currently vogue jazz-pop-funk can be put to good, artful use... an intelligently wrought work in a guilt-free accessible vein. It's a good show from all involved.

- **Jazziz**

It took him long enough, but last year Randy Brecker got around to making a straight-ahead album. In The Idiom, and it proved to be a tour de force in writing as well as playing.

- **Village Voice**

Mr. Brecker's playing is strong and inventive. The old clichŽ about (how) this could be a classic Blue Note 60's date is true here and there are times when the trumpeter suggests Lee Morgan and the early Freddie Hubbard... excellent. I suspect (In The Idiom) will last over the years to come. Recommended.

- **Cadence Magazine**

In the same idiom (i.e. the Blue Note sound of the 50s and 60s) is In The Idiom. Since Brecker is a versatile and ubiquitous trumpeter, one assumes that this is a deliberate focus on his roots, especially since he wrote all the tunes... Brecker has the chops to play it cool or hot, laid-back or virtuosic. \* \* \* \*

- **Downbeat Magazine**

Excellent sonic showcase, an hour of intelligent originals by an all-star band. The trumpeter's interplay with Joe Henderson's tenor is as good as it gets.

- **Billboard**

When the evolutions occur. Randy Brecker will be right there in the thick of it, making the same kind of high quality music that's marked his prolific musical life.

- **Windplayer Magazine**

The album (Amanda) is such a success that it could be used as an example of the wonderful things a marriage can do.

- Ralph Novak, People Magazine

Trumpeter, Randy Brecker is a clever scoundrel. He manages to play some of the most marketable easy-listening jazz in the world. But at the same time, he's also able to inject a considerable amount of depth and conviction into his music. The code word is excitement.....

- **Hugh Wyatt, New York Daily News**

(In The Idiom)... is infused with his return to fresh appeals of acoustic straight-ahead jazz.... his brilliance in ideas and emotive fire are welcoming gifts he has long displayed from early on.

- **Herb Wong, Jazz Educators Journal**

## **REVIEWS OF RANDY BRECKER LIVE**

**LIVE: Randy Brecker @ the Van Dyck, 2/6/10**

by Andrzej Pilarczyk, Nippertown.com

Influential trumpet master Randy Brecker rolled into Schenectady's premier music club the Van Dyck on Saturday night - by himself. No James Taylor, no Bruce Springsteen, no Steely Dan or David Sanborn in tow. None on a list as long as your arm of greats with whom Brecker has played and recorded.

Instead, Brecker took the helm of an excellent rhythm section comprised of Nippertown jazz veterans: keyboardist Jon Werking (Jill Hughes' band), bassist Otto Gardner (Lincoln Mayorga) and drummer David Calarco (Nick Brignola).

Launching two separate shows that night (one at 6:30 and one at 9pm), Brecker's blistering trumpet and flugelhorn lines sailed through the modern jazz idiom balancing originals with standards and running the gamut from ballads to the blues. The quartet sizzled with energy, percolating behind Brecker's every note.

The music was of the highest caliber with the inspired rhythm section scoring points on every song. Brecker looked pleased and shot intermittent smiles of appreciation to them as they played. Though the performance took place in the Van Dyck, if you closed your eyes and listened closely, it could have been Carnegie Hall.

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**RANDY BRECKER: The Van Dyck - Schenectady, NY - February 6, 2010**

by J Hunter, AlbanyJazz.com

I had just stepped into the Van Dyck Lounge's club area, and was getting directions to my table when Rosemary Latagano walked up and told the manager, "He has a seat down front." Hey, who was I to argue? All together now: "It's not what you know - it's who you know." Now, the table Van Dyck management had reserved for me was perfectly cool; it had a clear shot at the stage, and the waitresses didn't have to worry about blocking the view of the entire audience. That being said, a choice between "a clear shot at the stage" and "three feet from the bell on Randy Brecker's flugelhorn" is no choice at all.

Brecker was playing the back end of a two-set night at the Van Dyck, which has been booking some pretty sweet talent into their re-vamped performance space: The Julian Lage Group's transcendent gig was my last show of 2009; blues diva Rory Block played acoustic there last month; and unless someone parachutes in over the next week or so, Steve Smith's Vital Legacy (featuring members of Smith's fusion group Vital Information and his trad outfit Jazz Legacy) will be the next show I cover. Even if all those shows hadn't happened or wouldn't happen, seeing a legend like Brecker in a small club like the Van Dyck was enough to make my year.

The whole band was in black - right down to Brecker's Kangol cap (worn forwards) and drummer Dave Calarco's beret - when they stepped onstage. Brecker's wardrobe sharply contrasted his short white beard, but he quickly showed us his chops haven't aged at all as he counted the quartet into "There's a Mingus a-Monk Us." The piece swung irresistibly as it mixed compositional elements of the two jazz greats referenced in the title, and Brecker was simply blowing the place up as he tore off note after note. I first heard Brecker in Blood, Sweat & Tears way too many years ago, and if there's a difference in how he played then and how high, hot, and tight he was on this night, it's small enough to be considered invisible.

Brecker was clearly digging the scene, and he told us so. "I'm really happy this club opened up again... It's just a stone's throw away on the train!" (There's a marketing slogan for you: "The Van Dyck Lounge: Cool and convenient!") Brecker's upbeat mood was reflected in the entire set, which jumped even on "The Marble Sea", a sumptuous bossa Brecker wrote over forty years ago on a beach in Beirut; his fluegelhorn brought a sense of romance to the piece without taking away its edge. Brecker wrote the grooving "Shanghai" in the city of the same name, and he laughed when he told us about the Russian musicians who that he pronounced the title "Shang-HIGH!" Brecker and pianist Jon Werking gave "All the Things You Are" a "Night in Tunisia" vibe, and the bebopping "Dirty Dogs" let Brecker reference the long-gone JazzTimes Super Band.

Somewhere in my notebook it says, "Otto - Just like Always." That pretty much sums it up, because no matter who Otto Gardner plays with, you're going to get deep, fat, sonorous bass lines and an unerring sense of lyricism. His solos on "Mingus" and "All the Things" were top-notch, and he swung a mean counter to Werking's bubbling solo on "Marble." Werking was hitting it like a hammer all night long, serving up percussive lines that matched Brecker's energy. And speaking of hitting it, Calarco was absolutely devastating, bringing the noise on his counters and solos, and then bringing it down with brushes and rims. This may have been a pick-up band, but they caught everything that came their way and threw it back like it was on fire.

"Softly As In a Morning Sunrise" was the "official" encore ("Since I'm too old to walk all the way there and all the way back..."), but the crowd kept howling and clapping, so he took that long walk back to the stage and finished us off with "an as-yet untitled slowwwwwww blues to take everybody home." If there's a better instrument than tenor sax for the blues, the flugelhorn must be it. Its singular tone says, "I got the blues so bad, they're RED!" Nobody had the blues when Randy Brecker was done - and thanks to Mike, Rosemary, and Mabel, I got to watch from three feet away.

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