

Bill Anschell

Shifting Standards

Bill Anschell, piano; Jeff Johnson, bass; D'Vonnie Lewis, drums

Origin 82757 (CD). 2018. Bill Anschell, prod.; Reed Ruddy, eng. DAD. TT: 61:23

Performance ****1/2

Sonics ****1/2

All jazz fans love horns. It is therefore paradoxical that, if told they could keep only one ensemble format in their record collections, many would hoard their piano trio albums. There is a special magic to a superlative piano trio, a unique purity and balance. No wonder it is called the minimum complete jazz orchestra.

There is a superlative piano trio based in Seattle, Washington. On the evidence here, one of the best places for a piano trio to record is also in Seattle: Avast Studios, with engineer Reed Ruddy at the board. *Shifting Standards* is a remarkably rich, clear rendering of Bill Anschell's piano, Jeff Johnson's bass and D'Vonnie Lewis's drums. They have been together 11 years. This program of nine old standards sounds new, personal and immediate. The trio's tendency is to slow songs down to ponder them and delve beneath their surfaces. Who knew that "You and the Night and the Music" contained so much darkness? "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered," subtly reharmonized, no longer whimsical, is fragmented and ambiguous. "All of You" is not a celebration but a striving, in fits and starts. "A Night in Tunisia," usually a vociferous proclamation, is withheld in suspenseful hesitations, then released in jarring thrusts.

And when Anschell's trio starts with a song that is already slow and wistful, like Leonard Bernstein's "Some Other Time," what transpires is intense. They enter an atmosphere where nothing is certain except the truths of human emotion, and even those truths must be reaffirmed moment to moment, in order to prevail over silence.

—Thomas Conrad