



all about jazz

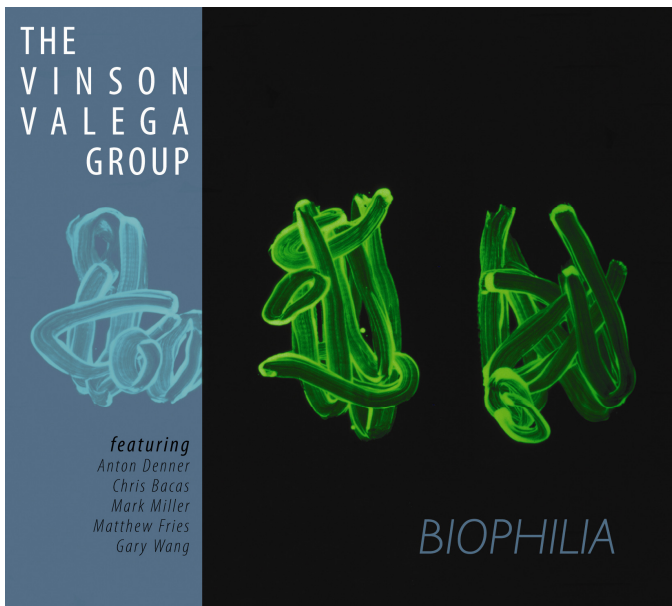
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Biophilia

Vinson Valega Group

Consilience Productions

by Karla Cornejo



Vinson Valega is a devoted environmental and progressive activist who seems engaged with his craft on an aesthetic level but also, it seems, in a profoundly logical, moral way. The drummer's compositions sound significant, as if every note were saying something, down to the slightest tap of the drumstick. This is not to say his records are wholly serious products. Valega demonstrates that quirk and laughter have their place alongside order and gravitas.

The strength of *Biophilia* lies in that its selection of songs work with each other, performed - perhaps even defined - in relation to each other. "Strange" is a tight little interlude that lasts less than a minute but serves as a promising buffer that delivers listeners to the last two tracks, which conceptually close off the record. The sweetness of "I Just Wanted To See What You Look Like" and "Charm" (the former more than five minutes long, the latter less than one) counteract with the

unapologetically tart “Day By Day”. The record sounds tight and easy and fresh, though it’s clear that the easiness is facilitated by preparation and the freshness necessitated by an unwavering commitment to compositional order. “Sunset and the Mockingbird” is an Ellington piece that sounds like a reinterpretation with the softer crescendos and the sharper, dagger-like sax notes that puncture through the rhythmic layers. That eases into “A Moment of Silence”, which is anything but. The piece is a frenetic assembly of yearning - the piano scattering in the opening notes, the elegant and restrained cascading that’s tempered by the almost intimidating drums about a third into the song.

Harmonic dexterity is one thing, orchestral ambition is another. But listening to a track like “Let” causes the listener to feel viscerally moved by the phantom sax and piano notes that seem to merge slowly, almost imperceptibly, into something accessible, groovy and memorable that seems finished. You begin to think that if the piece closes at any one of two or three possible ending points throughout its length, it would be fine because it’s had its say and said it well. The piano and drums come in humbly, begging to differ, challenging what’s there and promising there are better moments to come.

*For more information, visit cslproductions.org.
This group is at Smalls May 1st. See Calendar.*

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