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Aspects by the Kevin Kizer Quintet

- Written by Jeff Wanser
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Neil Tesser, who wrote the notes for this release, calls Kizer's music "chamber jazz." Well, okay, that's one element of what the Kevin Kizer Quintet is doing. They have a violin, and there are some introspective moments that suggest at times a classical approach to jazz. But there's a lot more going on that ranges from bop to fusion to gypsy jazz, and it seems as if Kizer is out to show just how versatile he is. He succeeds admirably.

Kizer had previously worked with Ted Sirota's Soul Rebels, among others, and seems to be looking for a sound that is quite different than the avant-garde approach of ten years ago. However, he has played lots of different styles over the years, and one would suspect that he's not about to be pinned down to a single one. For this album he recruited two members of the Soul Rebels, string men Dave Miller (also an indie rock guitarist) and Jake Vinsel. Neal Wehman plays rock and R&B as well as jazz, so he's ready for anything. For the fifth member, Kizer had to look no further than his own house for violinist Katherine Hughes, his wife. She has played all styles, working with everyone from Tony Bennett to Yo-Yo Ma to Yes. All are active in multiple projects in the Chicago music scene, and this album was recorded in a church in the suburbs of the city in 2010.

Among the many striking things about this release is the sense of democracy and interaction. Although Kizer puts his name on the group, everybody gets extensive time, everybody (except Wehman) has a composition here, and even the individual compositions don't necessarily feature the musician who wrote them. Jake Vinsel takes the first shot with "Titled," but although you can certainly hear his bass, this is very much a group affair. Dave Miller is up next, with "Breath," but Vinsel is more prominent here than in his own piece, and while Miller does have a good long solo (his guitar sound seems more

fusion-influenced than anything else), he provides plenty of space for the others. Katherine Hughes takes the first one, and her sound reminds me a bit of Stephane Grappelli (not everywhere), a turn away from a chamber style.

They go for bop on the third track, "I'm Drifting Apart," the only one not written by a band member (a John Scott tune). Here Kizer takes the lead with Miller supporting, who then takes over from Kizer. On other pieces, such as "Becky's Bash," Hughes and Miller trade solos, followed by some drum work by Wehman. No track has a single soloist, and every piece has a different feel, in part due to the variety of instrumentation. It's a great mix, and the group works remarkably well together; a feeling of familiarity and comradeship abide. The group's approach is also very melody-oriented and the tunes are catchy and fun.

The album ends with a Hughes arrangement of "O Sacred Head," quieter than most of the other tunes, but simultaneously light and intense in approach, owing to Hughes and Miller taking the leads. The variety of sounds and styles, the level of playing, and the clear engagement and joy of the musicians in their work all lead me to recommend this highly.

Additional Info

- Artist / Group Name: Kevin Kizer Quintet
- CD Title: Aspects
- Genre: Straight-Ahead / Classic
- Year Released: 2011
- Record Label: BluJazz
- Tracks: Titled, Breath, I'm Drifting Apart, A Mile Deep, A Minor Challenge, Independence Day, Voids, Becky's Bash, O Sacred Head
- Musicians: Kevin Kizer (tenor, alto, and soprano saxophones), Katherine Hughes (violin), Dave Miller (guitar), Jake Vinsel (bass), Neal Wehman (drums)
- Artist Website: kevinkizermusic.com
- Label Website: blujazz.com
- Rating: Four Stars

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