

Jazz CD Reviews

Ahmad Jamal – Blue Moon – The New York Sessions – Jazz Village

A true original in every sense of the word.



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**Ahmad Jamal – Blue Moon – The New York Sessions – Jazz Village JV 570001, 75:57 ****:**

(Ahmad Jamal – piano; Reginald Veal – double bass; Herlin Riley – drums; Manolo Badrena – percussion)

Ahmad Jamal is one of those pianists whose style is instantly recognizable not only for his minimalist playing, but also for the way he uses quirky stops, starts, time and space. These idiosyncrasies are on full display in his latest release *Blue Moon* on the Jazz Village label and depending upon your point of view it can be either challenging or annoying. In any event Ahmad Jamal will have your full attention.

In this project, Ahmad Jamal offers a combination of his original compositions, some tried and true pop standards and one jazz tune, all of which allow him to execute the full range of his interpretative powers. In addition the support on bass, drums, and percussion provides him with the freedom to roam over the keyboard as the muse strikes him. One of Jamal's originals, "Autumn Rain," opens the proceedings with some extravagant chording, coupled with some fulsome runs designed to emulate the track's designation. The title tune "Blue Moon" is done in a peek-a-boo fashion with the melody popping up from time to time as Jamal lays out his musical ideas with the appropriate luxuriant dynamics. There are two extended cuts, over thirteen minutes in length, "Invitation" and his composition "I Remember Italy" in both of which Jamal and the band are in full flourish. Every original concept that Jamal has with regard to melody, rhythm, and musical dynamics are put on display for the listener to absorb. There are the un-reproducible arpeggios, the bass line vamps, and the bubbling invention that all add to the music's unpredictability.

As the program continues, we get an almost a straight-ahead performance of the David Raskin/Johnny Mercer ballad "Laura" with more lush lyricism and fewer pyrotechnics than in some of the other tunes. Perhaps that might be due to the fact that he is only accompanied by bassist Reginald Veal. There has never been any question that Jamal has grown as a pianist since his first acclaim with the recording of "Poinciana" in 1958. This is evident if one compares his rendition in the same year of "Woody'n You" from the album *Live At The Pershing: But Not For Me* to his current reading of the tune. Gone is the tasty breathy brush work of drummer Vernell Fournier which supported the somewhat standard interpretation of the Dizzy Gillespie composition. It has been replaced by a denser, more baroque dimension, with much stronger drumming by Herlin Riley. Both renditions are unique in their own way.

Now in his early eighties, Ahmad Jamal has not lost any of his imagination, inspiration or technique. He is a true original in every sense of the word.

TrackList: Autumn Rain; Blue Moon; Gypsy; Invitation; I Remember Italy; Laura; Morning Mist; This is The Life; Woody'n You

—Pierre Giroux