



To The Brink! - Robert Conti

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www.robertconti.com

Robert Conti - Guitar, Rocco Barbato - Saxophones, Billy Moran - Hammond B3, Aldo Bentivegna - Drums.

"To The Brink!" restates everything that folks are finding out about Robert Conti: he is one of the very top modern jazz guitarists. He possesses incredible technical chops that ALWAYS deliver great solo lines. He is an encyclopedia of harmonic invention who effortlessly performs lyrical, satisfying chord solos. But, what is not often publicly stated about Conti is that he is a superb accompanist and "comper." His support of others is sensitive, never obtrusive, yet very inventive and refreshing. The CD is a textbook about how jazz guitar comping is done. And finally, like the great Art Blakey, Conti is a wonderful bandleader who coaxes the absolute best from his fellow musicians. All of these reasons add up to one conclusion: you need to hear this CD!

This release is particularly important to all his fans, as it is the first since "Comin' On Strong" in 1990. However, Conti is so completely dedicated to the development of his absolutely first-rate guitar education materials and performances (primarily in Las Vegas and California) that there has been little time left to record. Congratulations to executive producer Paul Getty for his vision and persistence in bringing this project to the public. Amazingly, "To The Brink" was done with all "first takes." The spirit of the recording harkens back to the old Blue Note recordings of the 50's and 60's where groups went into the studio and cut a recording in one or two days between gigs. Conti believes "every straight ahead jazz performance is like a snapshot of a one-

time event. It's jazz the first time." This is REALLY refreshing for the listener. Simple, yet high-quality production values capturing spontaneous, impassioned blowing. It is the epitome of great straight-ahead jazz.

The programming is excellent. After opening with a tour-de-force burner ("To The Brink") where all of the members of the quartet get to stretch-out, Conti delivers a musical buffet that delights the listener. Beautiful renditions of "Here's That Rainy Day" and "Our Love Is Here To Stay," which feature Conti's exquisite and imaginative chord solo work. His tongue-in-check originals ("Pork Loin," "Pit Stop," "Mister Twister's Fanfare," and "The Hooker") reveal his equally deep roots in bebop and especially in the blues. Of particular interest are the two compositions by guitarist/author/composer, Mark Stefani. "Anticipation" is a lovely and personal bossa nova that has Barbato on soprano sax, and Conti revealing his tender and introspective lyricism on this beautiful composition. Another Stefani original, "So To Speak" is a perfect setting for this classic guitar/organ quartet. Here, Conti shows that he is a master of soulful minor blues playing with a short, yet burning solo that also inspires Barbato to show some Cannonball and Gene Ammons roots.

For this CD, Conti has assembled a quartet with himself on guitar, young Rocco Barbato on saxophones, veteran Billy Moran on the B3, and wonderful drumming by Aldo Bentivegna. Conti offers generous solo space to his compatriots, who all rise to the level of their boss's passionate ingenuity. Barbato possesses a modern sound and attitude, yet has done his homework on great mainstream saxophonists. He is a pleasure to listen to, especially on the numerous occasions where he is trading fours with Conti. The "fours" threaten to blow the doors off! Aldo Bentivegna is a perfect "Conti" drummer in that he can adjust to any style and mood that is necessary and he swings like crazy. He can be light and airy, and then turn around and deliver a muscular shuffle like on the ribs joint-style tune, "Mister Twister's Fanfare." The biggest surprise on this recording is Billy Moran, a top-notch B3 player that can successfully go toe-to-toe with Conti. He really knows how to tell a story with his playing and build terrific solos. And like all great B3 players, his bass lines are excellent. I would like to have heard Conti and Moran trading some fours. Two old vets going after each other - maybe on a future CD.

A mark of a great jazz performance is that the listener wants to hear more. That is certainly the case with "To The Brink!" Conti has got it all and Getty has put him into a format that really shines. We should all eagerly await the next Conti CD project!

Reviewed by Mike Irish, Director of Jazz Studies, Michigan Tech University.