

REVIEW

Slicin' n Dicin' Singin' n Swingin' Ras Chemash Lamed

Produced: Ras Chemash Lamed, Saul Rubin, Marc “Jolo” Moise
Recorded December 2015 at Zebulon Sound and Light
Recording and Mixing Engineer: Saul Rubin

Personnel: Ras Chemash Lamed, voice/arrangements; Ed Stoute, piano; Saul Rubin, guitar; Eric Lemons, bass; Brian Carter, drums; Neil Clarke, percussion

By: Nora McCarthy

New York City native son, Ras Chemash Lamed is a singer and storyteller who lays claim to his musical heritage in his new release, *Slicin' n Dicin' Singin' n Swingin'*; a title that says it all—referencing the fact that Lamed is also a chef, in fact, his moniker is the “Singing Chef.” A singer with a song in his heart and an earnest message to deliver, Lamed is a late bloomer when it comes to singing professionally, his first career being that of a vegan chef and restaurateur. Starting out later in life to forge a musical career in the tradition of the great jazz balladeers, he discovered the ingredients that would culminate in a second career for him.

Ras Chemash Lamed born Herb Grant is a man of adventure and curiosity with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, especially as it pertains to the struggle of Black Americans. He moved from New York City to Atlanta in 1994 and lived there for 15 years. From Atlanta he moved to New Orleans and lived there from 2008-2011. His decision to leave New York came in the form of a calling to find a deeper meaning to his life. His quest took him to New Orleans where he found spiritual enlightenment and his voice. A natural storyteller, he speaks of how he was inspired by the amazing courage of the slaves who traveled from New Orleans to Canada seeking freedom, escaping through the dangerous snake and gator infested swamps of Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia; how brave they surely were and how desperate to have risked life and limb to escape the hell of slavery in New Orleans. The impact of traveling that same route so many years later, seeing it firsthand and the dangers those early ancestors encountered, the fears they surely must have experienced and their strength of spirit was an epiphany for Lamed. Their journey, became the catalyst for his journey and his personal pursuit of happiness—a freedom of another kind—through music.

A good singer must have a story to tell and furthermore must know how to tell that story and translate it into musical terms. Charlie Parker said “If you don’t live it, it won’t come out of your horn.” Ras Chemash Lamed has a story to tell.

Slicin' n Dicin' Singin' n Swingin' is comprised of seven classic songs from the jazz repertoire written by some of the greatest composers of the 20th century namely: Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein, Duke Ellington, Oliver Nelson, Horace Silver, John Coltrane and Antonio Carlos Jobim. None of these familiar compositions are your

average bill-of-fare however and are challenging to sing. They have been performed by some of the best singers in the business such as Ella Fitzgerald, Mark Murphy, Carmen McRae and Jeanne Carn to name but a few. “All The Things You Are” has been covered thousands of times and is a must know at jam sessions and should be in every singer’s book. However, it is not an easy song to sing because it moves in the cycle of 4ths and then it briefly modulates to the 3 major and then the whole chord progression happens again a fifth up from the original chord progression – tricky waters to navigate that require good ears and vocal placement especially when it is moving at an up tempo. And Lamed chose to kick off his story with “All The Things You Are” at an up tempo swing which he sings in full anticipation of all its possibilities. His testament to the people who traversed those treacherous swamps and to the potential in all of us.

Lamed assembled some of New York’s finest musicians to help him tell his story: Ed Stoute-piano; Saul Rubin-guitar; Eric Lemons-bass, Brian Carter-drums; and, Neil Clarke-percussion. Each brings something special to the project without the need to overwhelm with lengthy drawn out solos they instead expertly put just the right touch on every song.

The arrangements, the home style live sound and the overall vibe of *Slicin’ n Dicin’ Singin’ n Swingin’*, is reminiscent of the jazz recordings of the 60’s and early 70’s and has that New York City sound—a combination of flavors from all the neighborhoods and boroughs, specifically the Bronx, where he was born and raised, Brooklyn and Harlem and their strong cultural ties to Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. There are no enhancements, just straight up playing and singing. It is a vocal jazz recording performed and recorded in the tradition. The arrangements are simple classic arrangements that allow each piece to stand on its own merit with only subtle embellishments by way of mixing and matching tempos and stylistic choices that transmit the emotional content of each composition very tastefully in two complimentary yet contrasting movements within and between each song.

Lamed’s voice occasionally sounds a bit like the soul jazz sounds of the great Leon Thomas but also brings to mind singers like Billy Eckstein and Eddie Jefferson with a light brushing of one of my favorite singers, Andy Bey, mostly the tone – all good stuff either way you “slice” it, Lamed has his own sound that is steeped in history.

In addition to being a staple on the New York jazz scene for several decades, guitarist Saul Rubin also recently ran a successful jazz vocalist series from 2010-2015 at Zeb’s, his production/performance venue in Chelsea. Rubin’s long list of collaborations is an impressive list of jazz royalty, including the great tenor legend Sonny Rollins, his soulful, swingin’ bluesy stylings and elegant technique adds a beautifully polished texture to the overall sound of the CD. The second track “Naima” begins with a lovely piano intro by Stoute intermingled with the sounds of shells rushing and rattling in the wind deftly produced by the immensely creative and highly skilled Neil Clarke. Lamed’s rubato interpretation of the lyrics burst forth into a joyous 6/8 feel that features flowing tropical solos by Stoute and Rubin replete with organist/pianist Doug Carn’s and jazz/pop vocalist Jean Carn’s lyrics—the husband and wife musical phenoms that produced many great albums on the historic independent label Black Jazz in the 1970s. “Naima” was

written by John Coltrane who wrote it as a love letter to his wife, Juanita Naima Grubb. Lamed cites it as his tribute to all women.

The Duke Ellington classic “Come Sunday” mixes African rhythms with Gospel and is a beautiful dance between piano, percussion and voice. Lamed’s vocal tonality is rich and righteous and he delivers the lyrics with the reverence and conviction of a preacher.

Lamed demonstrates a natural earthen vocal quality on the Horace Silver classic “Señor Blues,” which is inspired by another strong African 6/8 feel. “Dindi” brings out the romantic qualities in Lamed’s voice as he plays around with the lyrics and different aspects of his instrument, his singing begins to open up into a relaxed free flowing style which continues on Oliver Nelson’s “Stolen Moments”, here Lamed manipulates his sound and the lyrics carefully shaping each word and each note. Lamed’s voice is in full bloom on Horace Silver’s “Peace”(again featuring the lyrics of Doug and Jean Carn) and it reaches its full expression, with open heart. Tracing his own footsteps through these seven well-chosen songs, Ras Chemash Lamed, accomplished what he set out to do—he tapped into his roots and thereby his greater purpose and he told his story masterfully. His is a voice that will continue to evolve from its ancient places to future stages and I look forward to hearing it unfold. An excellent first outing.

The CD Release Party and Concert for Slicin’ n Dicin’ Singin’ n Swingin’ is Sunday, October 23, 2016, Showtime: 5pm at JOLO’S, 49 Lawton Street, 10801, New Rochelle, New York

Nora McCarthy is a New York jazz vocalist, composer, poet, lyricist and educator with 35 years of performance experience. She is the founder of: Agents For Creative Musicians (<http://www.agentsforcreativemusicians.com>) and The Zen of Singing, The Spiritual Path To Finding Your Voice™ (<http://www.thezenofsinging.com>). Additionally, Ms. McCarthy is the former Associate Publisher and Writer for Jazz Inside Magazine and currently writes and blogs for Cadence Jazz Magazine. Nora and her groups perform all over New York City and elsewhere in the world.