



For Lew
Bill Warfield Big Band (Planet Arts)

by Donald Elfman

This extraordinary compilation of recordings made between 1990-2014 documents the continued vitality of the big band format, especially when populated by exceptional players and led by an artist of broad vision.

It takes on special poignancy as trumpeter Bill Warfield dedicates it “to the memory of my mentor, colleague, friend and inspiration, Lew Soloff” (who passed away three years ago this month). *For Lew* also includes two unreleased tracks from those earlier recordings and four tunes featuring Soloff in the trumpet section; in one case he’s the featured soloist.

Standard “Old Devil Moon” is an unreleased track from 1997 and a powerful vibrant opener. The band, buoyed by guitarist Dave Stryker and the trumpets, swings definitively, with bracing solos by alto saxophonist Andy Fusco and pianist Joel Weiskopf. From the same album and also unreleased comes John Coltrane’s “Some Other Blues”, a dazzling showpiece for the orchestra in beautifully frenzied mode. Walt Weiskopf is the passionate tenor soloist and is followed in equal measures of intensity by the leader himself. Bassist Jeff Fuller wrote and arranged “Salsa En Mi Alma”, a lovely Latin dance number with flute and piccolo and a beautiful, imaginative solo by Soloff.

Warfield and his band bring individual color to a broad spectrum of musical expression: Wayne Shorter’s “The Three Marias” reflects its composer with a bouncy groove and high notes from the saxophones; original “A Little Circus Music” is a non-stop dance and features that same kind of force from tenor saxophonist Rich Perry; and Charles Mingus’ “Goodbye Porkpie Hat” has a bittersweet feel via Warfield’s muted trumpet and brilliant arrangement, with which, apparently, Soloff was quite taken as he might well be by all these fine performances by this dynamic big band.