

## AFRO BOP ALLIANCE

ANGEL EYES (Zoho)



The most unusual feature of the septet Afro Bop Alliance is the presence of steel pans in the frontline alongside trumpet and alto and tenor saxophones. A recent addition to the band, pans player Victor Provost is a vigorous and dazzling soloist, and the resonating tonal color he provides in the ensemble is both an ethnic identifier and a hip variation on the usual horns plus percussion-loaded

rhythm-section sound. This Washington, D.C.-based group, led by drummer Joe McCarthy and already notable for winning a 2008 Latin Grammy, may be in line for additional awards with this album.

The program mixes originals by the band members with standards and jazz tunes. Bassist Tom Baldwin's "The Jinx" introduces the frontline blend, and there is a terrific bold, throaty-toned solo by tenorman Luis Hernandez, a member of the U.S. Navy Commodores. Provost's "Homenaje" features guest clarinetist Paquito D'Rivera for a long, boppish solo after the opening pans melody. McCarthy and percussionist Roberto Quintero, a guest throughout the album, are featured together before clarinet and pans take the performance home. "Nature Boy" introduces vocalist Sara Jones and the St. Claire Chamber Strings in an enticing reading of this standard. The title tune, another standard, is given a Latinized groove and interpretation of the melody, with a Woody Shaw- and Freddie Hubbard-like solo turn later by trumpeter Tim Stanley. Wayne Shorter's "This Is for Albert" includes lyrical solos by Stanley and alto saxophonist Vince Norman. Pianist Harry Appelman offers several strong, rhythmic solos throughout the album, and working in concert with Baldwin, McCarthy and Quintero he sets up hypnotic *montuno* grooves.

The "Bop" in the band's name can be best described as hard bop in the Jazz Messengers vein—forthright and hard-hitting with a certain swagger. Based on this album, McCarthy and company delight in the music and are emotionally invested in each note and beat. **OWEN CORDLE**