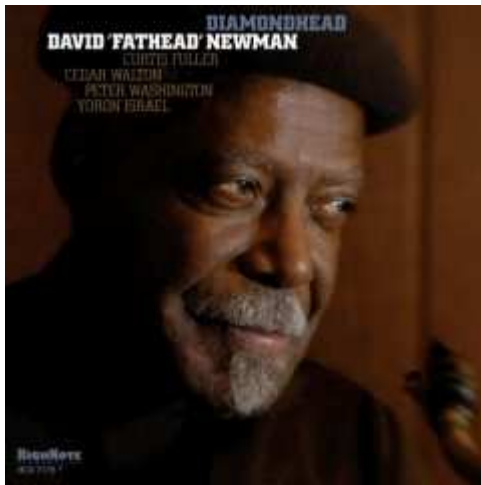


JazzTimes

DAVID “FATHEAD” NEWMAN

Diamondhead (HighNote)

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At 75, Texan tenor/alto saxophonist and flutist David “Fathead” Newman is still kicking muscular licks and humorous asides like a kid hanging with the likes of those he played with throughout his formative years, Lowell Fulson and Ray Charles. Some of the tension and earthy grit may be gone, replaced by a grooving warmth. But the soul of a hard-bop head and R&B honker lingers long through this, Newman’s most cosmopolitan-sounding effort. That last statement’s a mouthful, what with Newman’s busy 21st century already crowded with seven strongly elegant albums before Diamondhead, including the ardent emotional I Remember Brother Ray.

But save for his choice of Billy Joel tunes (“New York State of Mind” is beneath Fathead and his worthy crew of pianist Cedar Walton and trombonist Curtis Fuller), this is Fathead at his most debonair. Coproduced by Newman with Houston Person, everything from Newman’s full-blooded tone on the stammering title track to his tender trappings throughout Hoagy Carmichael and Johnny Mercer’s gorgeous “Skylark” to his ferocious but still flitty interplay with Fuller and Walton on “Cedar’s Blues” shows a proud lion with a handsome mane—yet not one quite ready for his winter. Along with the potent, prickly, self-penned title track (a true Texan groove is what Newman and his rhythm men hit upon), Newman’s “My Full House” and “Mama-Lou” have the feel of dustbowl gospel and blues about them, proving that this lion’s still ready to play in the dirt.

-A.D. Amorosi