

DOWN BEAT

January 2005

Clark Terry / Chicago Jazz Orchestra

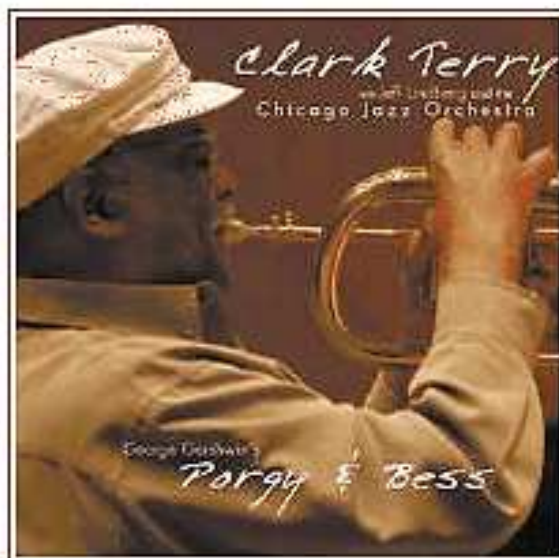
Porgy & Bess

A440 MUSIC GROUP

There are many fine trumpeters who might have stepped honorably into the role Miles Davis created in Gil Evans' 1958 reworking of Gershwin's *Porgy & Bess* for Columbia. That alone would have been enough to make this presentation by the Chicago Jazz Orchestra an event of some interest. But I can't imagine any soloist working today who

could have brought as much to the task as Clark Terry in terms of skill, understanding, authority and, most important, individuality of voice. This isn't an imitation of the original; it's an alternative from one of the few players of Davis' generation who was his equal in reputation and who is still working at the highest level. Because Terry is a peer in his own right, not an apostle, he has license to make this his own within the limits of Evans' score, a license he exercises with masterly taste.

There are one or two carefully chosen amendments. "Gone" was the one non-Gershwin piece in the original Evans work. Created by Evans as an improvised overture to the Gershwins' "Gone, Gone, Gone," it's appropriately opened up here by another 75 seconds to accommodate a lively exchange between Terry and Art Hoyle in a crisp overlapping dialog. Also on "Honey Man" there's a brief mumbled vocal by Terry, perhaps overdubbed, assuming he played the muted solo as well. A straight instrumental would be preferred, but it's all so brief as to be trivial.



Terry brings a slightly warmer texture to material by simple virtue of his own patented sound. As was Davis in '58, he is particularly majestic on "Prayer" and his warm lyricism is flawlessly full-bodied throughout.

He can also turn a phrase with a bit more elegance than the more taciturn Davis. But none of this is to say that this is a superior version, only to point out shades of difference the two soloists bring to the set parts of the work.

Where the score stops and the soloist is left to his wits, Terry's improvisations are his own, utterly assured and fluent. It would be as much a folly to weight these two versions in terms of better or worse as it would be to ignore the fact that a definitive version exists that will always be a presence in other performances.

Jeff Lindberg conducts the Chicago Jazz Orchestra with a knowing reverence for Evans' tempos, dynamics and balances. More than that, it sometimes seems to reach even deeper into nuances of the blends than the original studio unit was able to. Also the manner of recording can influence our response to the music almost as much as the music itself. And this has been beautifully recorded in a way that captures the ensemble in a wonderful concert hall presence similar to the original sound of the Columbia LP. It would have been a terrible blow had it been made in the usual mega-miked manner in which so many big band sessions are done.

_ John McDonough