

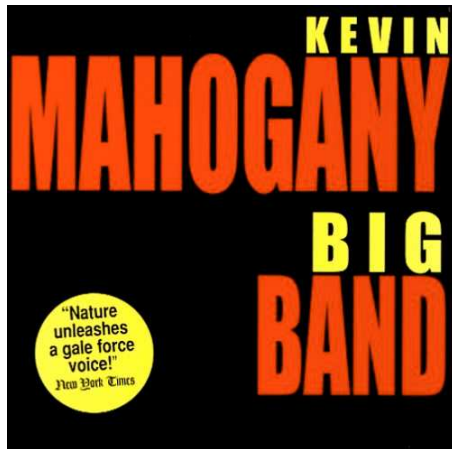


Kevin Mahogany

Big Band

(Lightyear)

Jack Bowers



Kevin Mahogany, the Kansas City cyclone, would sound terrific singing in the shower or standing on his head. The presence of a big band (actually four) on nine of the ten selections on his newest album is merely icing on the cake. No, this isn't actually "the Kevin Mahogany Big Band," but the four bands represented here will do quite nicely, thank you..

Mahogany is blessed with a voice that is instantly seductive—smooth as butter, sweet as honey and deep as a freshly dug well. When he sings "There Will Never Be Another You," the "you" to whom the avowal is aimed is quite likely swooning with rapture. There's an occasional nod to the great Joe Williams, as on "In the Evening," but for the most part Mahogany sounds like

no one but himself, which is, to borrow Cole Porter's phrase from track nine, "All Right with Me."

The ensemble on the first six numbers is led by Mahogany's good friend, the late composer/pianist Frank Mantooth, who arranged everything save Ellington's "It Don't Mean a Thing" (scored by Matt Harris). Track seven features a band led by drummer T.S. Monk (in an arrangement by Don Sickler), track eight the Kansas City Boulevard Big Band, track nine the Big City Swing Jazz Band, on which Mahogany shares the Porter lyric with Veronica Martell. The finale, Ellington's "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," the only non-big band track, is a charming duet with the late pianist James Williams.

A couple of minor points—"Three Little Words" isn't the Harry Ruby/Bert Kalmar standard but an original composition by Mahogany and Paul Hofmann, while "Dear Ruby" is of course Monk's "Ruby, My Dear" (lyric by Sally Swisher). Roy Hargrove delivers a tasteful flugel solo on that showpiece, and there are a number of meaty statements elsewhere, notably by tenors Scott Robinson, Pete Christlieb and Pat LaBarbera; trumpeters Bobby Shew and Danny Barber, pianist Ramsey Lewis, alto Kim Park and trombonist Paul McKee (Mantooth Orchestra), alto Craig Treinen (KC Boulevard Band), alto Jon Gordon and tenor Bob Sheppard (Big City Swing Band).

But it is Mahogany whose persuasive magnetism overshadows the enterprise and makes every aspect rewarding. Talent like his doesn't arrive often, and if it weren't for his love of jazz (I hesitate to say this, as I wouldn't want to give him any ideas), Mahogany could probably make it big as a pop singer. From what I've heard, there aren't many who could hang with him. For now, let's be happy he has chosen jazz, and chosen to sing with big bands, where his rich voice and easygoing manner seem perfectly at home.

Agency

Jim Wadsworth Productions

Steve Frumkin 330.405.9075 wadsworthjazz@sbcglobal.net

Jim Wadsworth 216.721.5624 jwadsworth@aol.com