

"**BURNIN GROOVES**"

REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS

Keyboard Magazine In Review - September, 2001

BY NED TORNEY

Burnin' Grooves

(ON SUMMIT RECORDS, PRODUCED BY JOEY DEFRANCESCO)

Chitlin'-circuit grits and gravy organ-guitar-drum trio jazz at its finest.

Produced by B-3 phenom Joey DeFrancesco, who appears on piano on "Girl Talk," this CD is a showcase for Monaco's formidable talents and the prismatic tonal landscape that is unique to the Hammond organ. Standouts include "Backward Shack" (an Homage to Jimmy Smith's "Chicken Shack"), the fiery "Jumpin the Blues", and an enticing arrangement of "Bluesette".

Monaco displays a virtuosity that is all the more amazing given his perseverance and triumph over the debilitating polio-related disease neuralgic amyotrophy. Like legendary organ trio jazz guitarist Pat Martino, who rebounded from a massive brain tumor in 1980 and rebuilt his guitar technique from scratch, Monaco had to relearn to play organ not once, but twice. Truly inspirational, as are the superbly executed performances on Burnin' Grooves . . . a must-have for jazz organ aficionados.

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JAZZREVIEW.COM

Featured Artist: Tony Monaco Trio

CD Title: "Burnin' Grooves"

Year: 2001

Record Label: Summit Records

Style: Contemporary Jazz

Musicians: Tony Monaco (Hammond B-3 organ, vocals) Joey DeFrancesco (piano) Paul Bollenback, Derek Dicenzo (guitar) Byron Landham, Louis Tsamous (drums)

Review: The organ is one of the most phenomenal instruments in jazz. In addition, it is a very rare instrument and not heard often. Prior to the likes of Jimmy Smith and Brother Jack McDuff, the organ was a mere whisper in most circles. Both Jimmy and Jack did remarkably well bringing the organ into the consciousness of jazz connoisseurs. Since those two individuals entered the picture, little has been heard about the contributions the organ has made to jazz, at least not until now. Enter Tony Monaco!

Tony Monaco is one of those rare personalities that has beaten the odds to achieve success. Tony has been playing music since he was eight years old, more specifically, he began playing the accordion. When he was 15 years of age, he was afflicted with a polio like disease that impacted his upper body to the point where he switched to the organ. Because the disease had destroyed many of the nerves in his shoulders, he had to learn to play all over again. The turning point came at age 20 when he visited Jimmy Smith at his club in Woodland Hills, California. During his visit, Tony played a set with his hero, which set the tone for much of what was to come professionally. Although circumstances such as a recurrence of his disease and an year hiatus away from playing his music, Tony Monaco has beaten the odds once again by putting together one of the finest debut jazz organ recordings since the days of Jimmy Smith. What is even more significant, Tony also sings on this release as well, a considerable feat, seeing as how his disease greatly affected his vocal chords during his illness.

"Burnin' Grooves" on the Summit Record Label is the culmination of all Tony Monaco has been striving for as a musician. This album is smooth, rambunctious and very pleasurable to listen to. It is filled with down-home blues oriented organ melodies set to superbly executed rhythmic expressions of first line grooves. This recording reaches out and grabs you in a way reminiscent of the glory days of the chitlin'-circuit, where the organ often reigned supreme. Look for Joey DeFrancesco on piano making his own influential statement with Monaco. Other supporting cast members consisting of Paul Bollenback on guitar and drummer Byron Landham do their part to add further credence to the dynamics of this release. Collectively, Tony and his trio bring the B-3 Hammond organ back into the forefront of jazz. "Burnin' Grooves" is definitely a fine display of the influence Jimmy Smith has had on Tony Monaco. It also shows Tony to be one of the most infectious organ players around today.

Reviewed by: Sheldon T. Nunn

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JAZZ IMPROV MAGAZINE

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By Bill Donaldson

"...thrilling and memorable...first rate"

If you could talk to the recording artist, you would probably find that a story lies behind the production of any CD. For example, Ashley Kahn wrote an entire book about a single recording session, *Kind Of Blue: The Making Of The Miles Davis Masterpiece*. The recording of an artist's music is a deeply personal endeavor, and one that lays bare the musician's soul and technique for the world to hear. The intent is to inspire the listener, or at least to connect with the listener in a soulful way. The introduction of negative vibes after the documentation of the artist's personal journey can be heart-breaking. In some cases, when the reviewer doesn't have time to listen to the music's spirit, but writes about it anyway, the criticism can be unjust, to say the least.

Tony Monaco's story so far is a positive one, and it is leading to his belated but growing recognition as one of the few younger masters of the Hammond B-3 organ. In fact, Monaco's life so far is one of many amazing stories, all of which have resolved in personal triumph over adversities that might have discouraged less determined and less inspired individuals. His most recent story goes like this:

In April, 2000, Joey DeFrancesco was booked to perform at the 5:01 Bar in Columbus, Ohio. In the midst of loud and rude young business types showing off for their girlfriends and thus ignoring the music, DeFrancesco was introduced to Tony Monaco, a local, relatively unknown jazz organist. A friendship developed among kindred spirits, for both of them had supportive Italian fathers who strongly encouraged their interest in the B-3 by facilitating their careers. And both Monaco and DeFrancesco have an intuitive understanding of the B-3's power that's unique among jazz instruments.

In the hometown of Don Patterson, Hank Marr, Nancy Wilson, Sweets Edison, Rusty Bryant and Rahsaan Roland Kirk, the two young organists decided not only to perform together, but also to record together. DeFrancesco used his influence to approach a number of labels. Monaco's *Burnin' Grooves* is the result, having been recorded and released by Summit Records near Phoenix, where DeFrancesco lives. Finally, Tony Monaco's music, through the assistance of his fellow jazz organ player, is reaching a nationwide audience. B-3 enthusiast and radio announcer Pete Fallico has discovered Monaco too, and as a result has contributed to the liner notes.

While some of the newer jazz organ players like Larry Goldings are experimenting with the instrument's potential for a variety of non-traditional sounds, Monaco is entirely within its soul tradition pioneered by Jimmy Smith. His opening number, "Blues For T," makes use of the B-3's potential for sustained tones, dynamic roars, sustained notes, changes of timbre as the tunes progresses, and a dramatic conclusion. In other words, Tony Monaco intuitively understands the secret of successful B-3 playing: the ability to build a thrilling and memorable solo.

In spite of the varied repertoire on *Burnin' Grooves*, Monaco's groups do exactly that. Toots Thielemans' "Bluesette" would seem to be far removed from the funk or gospel sound of the other jump or blues tunes on the CD, but Monaco introduces the tune with drama and logic. In the process, Monaco makes the tune his own, percolating behind guitarist Paul Bollenback as he flows through an extended solo initially over a

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single chord. Even then, Monaco's presence is felt with bright exclamations, accented jabs and subdued tremolos. When Monaco re-enters, his solo, like Bollenback's, improvises ominously over the chromatic vamp associated with the tune before being releasing into unpredictable flight.

Indeed, Monaco's style is one that remains within the consistent personality he stamps with his music, but also one that doesn't repeat itself. He seems to be a source of constantly shifting ideas that consider a tune as a possibility for embellishment and wonder. His composition, "Backward Shack," refers unabashedly to Jimmy Smith's style of rocking blues. Monaco maximizes its potential through the use of ever-rising excitement created by joyous shout chorus, Monaco holding down the pedal tone through ever-rising intensity and machine-gunning one-note punctuations.

As producer of the CD, Joey DeFrancesco graciously holds back and lets Monaco be the center of attention. DeFrancesco's working group consisting of Bollenback and drummer Byron Landham work with Monaco on six of the tracks. DeFrancesco plays piano on "Girl Talk," the one track on which Monaco sings.

And therein lies another story. For at the age of thirty-five, Monaco experienced a return of the effects of neuralgic amyotrophy, a painful genetic condition. But for the first time, it affected his vocal cords, and surgery restored his speech. Not only did he learn to talk again, but he learned to sing again. "Girl Talk" is one of the results, Monaco's rich tenor interpretation staggering the notes and delivering the lyrics as a wry conversation of bafflement and wonder. Monaco's tribute to Wes Montgomery, "Road Song," makes it singable in his personalized way, and he takes the tune at the same tempo with which Montgomery recorded it. But while paying tribute, he uses the tune as a point of departure, as well. In the same vein, he honors Charlie Parker on "Jumpin The Blues" even as he takes off with his own solos that maximize the use of harmonic form and B-3 sonic potential.

Monaco's regular group of guitarist Derek DiCenzo and drummer Louis Tsamous recorded three of the tracks in Columbus, and the camaraderie is evident on each of them. The slow blues of "So Long For Now" allows the group to stretch out for an after-hours type of feel that signifies the last dance before the club closes. Their interpretation of Blue Mitchell's "Fungi Mama" establishes a medium-tempo sense of fun that the trio obviously enjoyed playing. Even DiCenzo, sometimes Monty Alexander's steel drum player, has a story to tell. After a drive-by shooter damaged a nerve in his arm with a BB, a possibility developed that he may not be able to play guitar again. Obviously, he recovered. As did Monaco several times. Their sense of joy and appreciation for continuing to play music was heightened, perhaps beyond that of others whose abilities were never as jeopardized. And you can hear that joy and appreciation in Tony Monaco's music.

He's a first-rate Hammond B-3 jazz organist.

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DECEMBER HOT SINGLE OF THE MONTH

by S.H. Watkins, Sr.

Artist: TONY MONACO
Album: BURNIN' GROOVES
Hot Single: ASHLEEN

(Summit Records - 2001)

This release is appropriately named because the CD is full of red-hot burnin' grooves. I was previewing the CD when a friend came in and asked if it was Jimmy Smith.... Jimmy Smith! that tells you raw and hot this release is. The Hammond B3 organ is a fine but fickle instrument, and Monaco's natural prowess taming the beast shows his raw talent for knowing when to bend a note or where to hold a chord, or when to fall silent then come grooving back in.

Ashleen is an original track done in a bluesy, jazzy style reminiscent of some vintage Jimmy Smith or Charles Earland pieces. I'll admit that this tune wanders into the blues realm a bit, but Monaco is soooooo expressive, wringing emotion from each passage. Accompanied by pianist Joey DeFrancesco and drummer Byron Lyndham Moncao and guitarist Paul Bollenback take you back to the smokey back-room-jazz-club atmosphere of the 40's and 50's. Very retro and very enjoyable.

The CD has four original tracks, and five covers including Charlie Parker's 'Jammin The Blues' where Tony really shows his chops, and Wes Montgomery's 'Road Song'. A special mention goes out to Monaco's smoking rendition of 'Girl Talk'...it was a toss-up whether to use that for the hot single this month (we went with Ashleen because it is an original). This entire CD has the three P's that make a hit... it's well planned, performed and produced. The cat is an original and the CD is truly jamming....try it.

by S.H. Watkins, Sr. JAZZUSA.COM

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ALLABOUTJAZZ.COM REVIEW

Burnin' Grooves

By Jim Santella

Tony Monaco fronts two organ trios on this album of hot standards. The leader and two excellent guitar traditionalists make the session stand out. Monaco maintains a lively rhythmic groove, while everyone adds fuel to the fire. Trading fours and stretching out, each trio member participates independently. And yet, they're cohesive. Derek DiCenzo and Louis Tsamous work with the organist on "Backward Shack," "Fungi Mama" and "So Long for Now." Paul Bollenback and Byron Landham – longtime associates of Joey DeFrancesco – jam with Monaco for the rest. The courage required of him in overcoming neuralgic amyotrophy speaks to the organist's enthusiasm. His motivation has carried him through tough times from age 15 on. External motivation has come from Jimmy Smith and Joey DeFrancesco; both encouraging him to perform with them at key intervals. More about Monaco's courageous battle and highlights from this, his latest album, are available from his web site.

Joey DeFrancesco sits in on piano for "Girl Talk," the session's lone vocal number. His romping interlude burns in vintage form. That track and "Bluesette" represent the album's high points. This is hot, straight-ahead jazz. There are no low points.

Track Listing: Blues for T; Backward Shack; Girl Talk; Fungi Mama; Jumpin' the Blues; Ashleen; Bluesette; Road Song; So Long For Now.

Personnel: Tony Monaco- Hammond B3 organ, vocals; Joey DeFrancesco- piano; Paul Bollenback, Derek DiCenzo- guitar; Byron Landham, Louis Tsamous- drums.

Jim Santella, Allaboutjazz.com

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Tony Monaco - Burnin' Grooves (Summit Records)

Grease Included! by Gilles Bacon

Tony Monaco is quickly gaining a well-deserved reputation as one of the best players, and nicest guys, on the organ scene today. How many musicians send you personally autographed CDs, even when you order online from their own website?

Jimmy Smith said it himself: "... one 'BAD' Organist!"

A lot of players can get the groove, but only a few can get the grease cookin'! This is one of the best (non-independent) initial releases in recent memory. Mr. Monaco had a previous CD called Let's Bop which he issued himself.

On this release, Tony brings us a number of Burnin' Grooves which don't stop entertaining. From fast runs rivaling even Joey's, to slow, greasy bass lines backing a guitar solo, Tony inspires with his relentless playing, amazing dexterity and beautiful touch. He is also graced with a deep, soulful voice which he demonstrates on Neil Hefti's "Girl Talk". To top it all off, Tony writes some very nice tunes such as the first two selections, "Blues For T" and "Backward Shack" (a tribute to Jimmy Smith's "Back At The Chicken Shack"). These originals are more memorable than a lot of tracks on recent organ releases.

Six of nine :) selections were recorded with Joey DeFrancesco (on piano) and his trio, Paul Bollenback and Byron Landham. The other three tracks with Tony's trio: Dereck DiCenzo plays a Wes-influenced style, and Louis Tsamous keeps the grooves going with solid drum work. Charlie Parker's "Jumpin' The Blues", Toots Thielemans' "Bluesette", Blue Mitchell's "Fungi Mama" and Wes Montgomery's "Road Song" are great additions to Tony's vocal cover and four originals.

Oh, and Joey plays some pretty mean piano too! :) He also produced the CD.

Biographical note (from Tony's web site): Tony started off and continues to play organ in the Columbus, OH area, hometown to organists like Hank Marr and Don Patterson, who were an influence on him. Tony's success is all the more amazing given his battle with neuralgic amyotrophy, a debilitating polio-related disease.

<http://www.b3monaco.com/>

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Reviews

All Music Guide

On the road to becoming a first-class operator of the B3 Hammond organ, Columbus, OH, native Tony Monaco has had to overcome roadblocks. The major one was a polio-like debilitating disease which forced him to change from accordion to organ. Another was the demands of a family business followed by the return of the disease. Undeterred, Monaco has made two albums with his trio, *Burnin' Grooves* being the second. He's joined on six tracks by his organ-playing peer, Joey DeFrancesco, who sits in on the piano. Monaco's playing exudes an exuberance that combines chitlin' rhythm & blues with gospel, especially on such cuts as "Ashleen." If this were being played before a live audience, they might jump up, exclaiming "Hallelujah" at the end. The Jimmy Smith influence is evident, as it should be given Monaco's fascination with the master's recordings at a young age. Given the strength of the B3, it would be easy to let it dominate other members of the trio. Instead, regular trio guitarist Paul Bollenback stretches out on such tracks as "Bluesette." For most tracks, Joey DeFrancesco's piano is submissive to Monaco's organ. But on "Girl Talk" he lets loose, backing Monaco's vocals (so much for the doctors who diagnosed he would never sing again). The blues-hued material gets set aside for a bouncy rendition of Blue Mitchell's "Fungi Mama," the guitar again playing a major role, this time by Derek DiCenzo. This album is indisputable evidence as to why organ trios have consistently been a popular combination in jazz, especially after the adoption of the flexible, electronic Hammond B3 by Fats Waller in 1939. It's also indisputable evidence that Tony Monaco deserves a spot in the upper echelon of the instrument's leading champions. ~ **Dave Nathan, All Music Guide**

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