



Kenney Polson | For Lovers Only

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by Jeff Becker

Saxophonist, Kenney Polson is not a new name on the smooth-jazz scene, but certainly he is an accomplished crossover artist. His tunes are a mixture of smooth-jazz and jazz flavored tunes that highlight his prowess as a composer. Based in the Pacific Northwest, he has lived and performed in over 50 countries. Polson has toured Japan, Korea, Hawaii, Colombia, Brazil, and over a dozen Caribbean Islands. In 2016 and 2017, he toured extensively with Rick James' Original Stone City Band playing major festivals such as Capital City Jazz Festival and Orange County Funk Fest in California.

On his latest album ***For Lovers Only*** Polson is joined by guitarist Bruce Conte and keyboardist Roger Smith (Tower of Power), trumpeter Larry Gittens (Kool & The Gang), guitarist Phil Upchurch (Donny Hathaway and George Benson), and smooth jazz pioneer – pianist Tom Grant. Trombonist Fred Wesley (Parliament Funkadelic) and bassist/vocalist Michael Henderson (Miles Davis, Stevie Wonder).

The classic “Stella by Starlight,” is given a funky treatment. Polson shows his classic chops with a melodism that resonates throughout the track with stylistic beauty. Pianist Tom Grant punctuates the track with a caressing approach that uplifts the harmonic beauty of the tune. The addition of backing vocals adds a nice lilt to the track. The overall approach is unaffected, featuring an organic approach towards instrumentation, but with a sensual backbeat that drives the tune.

There is nothing I like more than a tune with a purpose. On this selection “Black Swan,” a Polson original, he pays tribute to the first Black-owned record company, Black Swan Records. Their releases were dubbed “race records” by non-whites, in order to make sales, many of their releases were about love. The tune is accentuated with synthesizers and features a duet between Polson and guitarist Phil Upchurch who has played with artists like Donny Hathaway and George Benson. The tune is distinctly smooth-jazz, with gorgeous tonality and an easy going feeling. Polson sweeps and swells with a warm and inviting alto tone. Guitarist Upchurch is flawless, his warm and fluid lines offer a transparency in tone and effortless technique for a solid listen.

Polson is a consummate professional, his recordings just get keep better with time. His fluidity and compositional flow are timeless, but with an updated sound that keeps you coming back for more. His latest offering ***For Lovers Only*** is a solid piece of artistry. Though based in relaxing themes of love, the ear can also appreciate the complexity and mastery of each player during the solo sections, making this a cut above smooth-jazz offering, that gives the ear plenty to enjoy.