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Nate Jarrell–Chris Acquavella: Duo LaRé

By Robert Bush | Posted December 24, 2011, 8:39 p.m.

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Duo LaRé is comprised of mandolin virtuoso **Chris Acquavella** and rising star guitarist **Nate Jarrell**, ably assisted on several tracks by additional musicians **Erdis Maxhelaku** on cello, **Harley Magsino** on double bass, and **Steve Haney** on percussion.

Recorded at San Diego's **Studio West**, the album's sound quality is superb.

Acquavella is really something else. He is proving once and for all that the mandolin is the equal of any member of the string-instrument family. He might be the **Joshua Bell** of the mandolin. Jarrell has already made a solid impression with his release *The Next Chapter*, here, he mostly concentrates on the acoustic. Whatever he's playing, Jarrell has got it all, chops, ideas and a distinctive, personal sound.

The album opens with an Acquavella original, "Mtarija." Over the single-note bowing of cellist Maxhelaku, the mandolin and guitar lay down intricate unison lines in a Middle Eastern vein, then they jump to counter-point over world-music percussion. Acquavella takes an astonishing solo, full of lightening fast strikes and violin like glissandi, egging on an equally strong response from the guitarist.

The title track, *In Other Words*, is a pensive and probing ballad that capitalizes on piquant mandolin harmonics. There is terrific sense of balance between the two instruments, and the players often seem to finish each other sentences. Jarrell squeezes in a potent nylon string solo that brought **Pat Metheny** to mind.

The whole group reinvents the **Miles Davis–Bill Evans** classic "Nardis" with sections of odd-time metrics and almost tango like rhythms — which may have been overstepping a bit, the melody to "Nardis" is exotic enough on it's own — still, there's a nice flow to this arrangement.

"Imardin" is Acquavella's solo tour-de-force, loaded with stair-stepping harmonic movement, layered with a haunting melody on top.

The show-stopper for me, though, is Jarrell's wonderful solo reading (on electric this time), of the gorgeous Metheny ballad, "Always & Forever." Using chord

melody as a device to move through and outline the theme, the guitarist manages to put his own stamp on the tune — a very difficult task to accomplish on a piece by a guy with as singular a voice as Metheny's music represents. "Always & Forever" ebbs and flows and streams in different contours from the original, maintaining listener interest for its entire length. Took my breath away. This is a sublime duet recording.

In Other Words is available on CD Baby. Check it out.

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