

## Sal Mosca | *Too Marvelous For Words* | Duster Magazine

To the stalwart Sal Mosca fan, the mother lode that is *Too Marvelous for Words* is apt in title. Those with more qualified affection for the influential Tristano-schooled pianist might approach this mammoth five-disc set with some measure of trepidation. Wherever one sits on the spectrum the collection does present the previously improbable question: how much Mosca is too much Mosca? It's not a question that had much bearing before as Mosca's discography as a leader was puzzlingly scant. Just a dozen or so albums to his name prior to his death in 2007 and a handful more released posthumously including last year's *Talk of the Town* on Sunnyside, a trio date from '92.

Producer Bob Rusch is a long time booster of Mosca's work and his presence at the project helm ensures the presence of extensive annotations and anecdotes for the music. He and a group of Mosca former students and fellow fans including pianists Connie Crothers, Larry Bluth and Dick Hyman, guitarist Don Messina and saxophonist Jimmy Halperin contribute a series of personal essays that place the sounds in revealing context. In the summer of 1981, Mosca embarked on a solo tour of the Netherlands. The tapes from the tour stayed in a box for the 35 years until Messina discovered them while preparing Mosca's archives for transfer to the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University shortly after his passing.

The set presents five separate concerts as played, each slightly truncated due to the excision of several tunes that couldn't be salvaged sonically. The acoustic properties and accompanying challenges of the individual venues are clearly discernible between concerts. Mosca recorded all of the music himself on a portable analog rig with the results varying from evening to evening. A total of 56 tracks showcase different facets of his repertoire with a mix of originals, bop-associated standards and a handful of pieces from his teacher Tristano and old running partners Warne Marsh and Lee Konitz's songbooks. The concert captured in Rotterdam (disc four) breaks ranks in presenting a lengthy series of Mosca originals (several of them contrafacts of standards) that spool out with the congruity of a medley configuration and feature the pianist at his most playfully fecund.

Musically, the opportunity to hold court over multiple nights in front of

appreciative audiences paid immediate dividends on Mosca's creative capital. The moments where he bucks convention and even decorum in favor of surprising interpolations and detours quickly become too numerous to catalog. Reharmonizations and rhythmic suspensions are numerous, though the music never feels mechanical like that of a technician going through the motions. The parity between his efficient left hand rhythms and flourishing right hand lyricism breathes life into even done-to-death parlor fare like "Sweet Georgia Brown" and "Stardust". Naked melodicism and populous ornamentations attend much of playing, in places bordering on the blissfully baroque, but Mosca usually dials things back before tipping over into cloying excess.

Single-sitting consumption of the set is probably the preference of only the most Mosca-dedicated. Having access to this much of the pianist's solo work in such a concentrated temporal setting from his prime is a boon regardless of how one answers the question of quantity posited at the top of the page. Mosca's is the sort of style-subversive musicianship that only rewards scrutiny. The points of welcoming ingress for the curious listener are legion.

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