

Sal Mosca --- *Thing-Ah-Majig* --- Zinnia 118
Downbeat 4 Stars out of 5

Though his biography will always have a front-loaded reference to Lennie Tristano, Sal Mosca most frequently prompts comparisons to Misha Mengelberg on *Thing-Ah-Majig*. Like the Dutch icon, Mosca, who turns 79 in April [06], has a propensity to seemingly stray from a tune's changes and tempo, only to reveal at the most propitious moment that he was simply on a well-timed stroll. Additionally, Mosca has similar knacks for turning tentative fragments inside out to reveal a supple elegance.

Still, there are fundamental differences in their sensibilities. There is nothing subversive about Mosca's extrapolation: He basks in the nostalgia of mid-century songs and jazz piano devices, and his occasional use of ringing unisons, florid chords and protracted cadences signals a zestfulness that Mengelberg won't muster. Even when Mosca explores a stilted stride feel on "I'll Remember April," it's not doctrinaire deconstruction, but serves the traditional purpose of building dramatic tension that gives way to the final reiteration of the theme, which in this case is wistful and touching.

Nothing stokes Mosca like counterpoint, and the results can be dazzling, as on "If I Had You." This is where any suggestion of age slowing Mosca down is debunked. Mosca keeps bassist Don Messina and drummer Bill Chittin on their toes throughout the album, which reveals the wisdom of Mosca's many years exploring the piano.

- Bill Shoemaker
pg. 78, © DOWNBEAT, April 2006

