

provides an intriguing foil for Malik, he seems less comfortable finding a fit with the drummer. Part of this is due to the fact that Moffett's exuberance often gets the best of him. He can lay back to a slow shuffle or jump into high gear, but there is little in between. The three do find a collective voice though, particularly on the tunes with boppish heads like "Ago (Go)" and "Nucleus." Less successful are the more open pieces where the three never seem to quite pull the threads together. Still, this provides a worthy addition to Malik's output.

Michael Rosenstein

**1) MIKA POHJOLA,
LIVE AT THE BLUE NOTE,
CHANGE 9024.**

A Farmer's Dream / And She Appeared / Kaféet / Relax in the Sun / The Myth of the Old Man / Dionysios / The Ice That Breaks / Magnetén / Mood 4:30 am. 55:47.

Pohjola, p; Matt Penman, b; Roberto Dani, d. 9/23/96, NYC, NY.

**2) WILL SELLENRAAD,
STREAMS,
BHP 80100.**

Pendulum / Stars Over Marakesh / All of You / Waiting / Boo Boo's Birthday / Lost / Naima / Stuffed. 56:55.

Sellenraad, g; Kiyoshi Kitagawa, b; Eric McPherson, d; James Hurt, p. 11/19 & 12/7/98, NYC, NY.

**3) DAVID BERKMAN,
COMMUNICATION THEORY,
PALMETTO 2059.**

Blutocracy (Blues for Bluto) / Colby / Interesting, Perhaps, But Hardly Fascinating Rhythm / Blue Poles / Communication Theory #1 / Really Little Waltz / Weird Knock / Communication Theory #2 / Back In the 90's / Remission / No Crosstalk / Communication Theory #3. 57:50.

David Berkman, p; Brian Blade, d; Chris Cheek, ts, ss; Ugonna Okegwo, b; Steve Wilson, as, ss; Sam Newsome, ss. 1/7/00 at Maggie's Farm, ?.

Here are three groups that take well-tested Jazz combo templates and mold them to their own devices while still retaining sincere affection for what's come before. All fall within what can safely be called the mainstream, but each manages to avoid much of the negative trappings that such a designation sometimes entails. In other words, while none of them is pushing the envelope, what's being sent has sufficient postage to ensure that the message is delivered.

Pohjola, a Finnish-born pianist now residing in New York, has a facile touch and quick-minded command of his keyboard. His rhythm partners on (1) are similarly versed with the appropriate acumen required for a successful piano trio excursion. In front of a courteous crowd at the Blue Note, they roam through a songbook devised for the date. The compositions are largely flexible vehicles for conventional improvisation. Pohjola seems to harbor a special affinity for soothingly emotive figures which cater to the crowd and elicit the polite applause which book-end each piece. There are also more introspective elements in his style as on "Magnetism." During these passages Penman and Dani seem to realize that it's Pohjola's show and dutifully hang back in the ensemble sound. Following an easily chartable course, the trio moves from uptempo pieces ("A Farmer's

Dream") to more languid fare ("And She Appeared"), always casting an attentive melodic reference to insure that the audience is with them. Overall there's not much here that jumps out and demands undivided attention, but it's a firmly swinging date nonetheless and the players work well within their respective capacities.

Sellenraad and his cohort on (2) are similarly centered on an accessible sound. The glossy tone he shapes from his strings isn't always to my liking, but his technique is tough to fault and he usually manages to pack an appreciable punch into his improvisations. Switching from hollow body to amplified acoustic, he crafts a variety of inviting chordal patterns from his instruments throughout the studio set. Beginning with the propulsive swing of "Pendulum," a piece that builds off an incessant rhythmic vamp, but stumbles a bit toward the close, the rest of the program focuses mainly on popular and lesser known standards with several originals interspersed. Kitagawa is a vigorous strummer who attacks his strings relentlessly and as a result there are points where his paucity of fineness ends up muddying his sound. He cleans up his approach considerably on a solo introduction to "Stars Over Marakesh," and still retains a meaty bottom-end fixation that fleshes out the subterranean sectors of the group. On the reading of "All of You," the players again seem initially uncertain of a unified direction, but Sellenraad takes control early and manages to successfully round up all of the stray melodic strands by the tune's close. Hurt, moonlighting from a regular gig with the Blue Note label, only appears on half of the tracks, but his contributions have a noticeable effect in smoothing out the band's sound and rounding off rough edges. The number of guitar trios operating in today's Jazz scene may be impossible to gauge, but on this date Sellenraad and his partners demonstrate enough enthusiasm and originality to assure themselves a safe niche amongst their peers.

Berkman's group on (3) is a little heavy on the horns, but his clever arrangements and the strength of his top-notch associates keep the sextet light on its feet. "Blutocracy" has a loud, raucous melody reminiscent of the comic strip character from which its name is derived. After a boisterous theme statement, the piece settles into a less rambunctious groove, but Blade's drums still fan the flames from beneath. "Colby" by contrast is a slow ballad feature for Berkman and he shows again that his finger is pressed firmly to a mainstream post-bop pulse. Working out of such a bag, it's easy to get stymied by the past, but he still manages to throw out a few melodic and harmonic curve balls to keep things from slipping into predictability. "Interesting, Perhaps, But Hardly Fascinating Rhythm" may have a wordy title, but Cheek's solo on tenor, a smoldering turn from Brinkman, and an Ornettish workout by Wilson all demonstrate a brisk economy when it comes to the music. "Blue Poles" builds off a call and response chorus between Wilson and Cheek that is carried to an exciting culmination by the complete ensemble. Berkman's title pieces are cyclical melodic ruminations, the first and third checkered with polyphonic patterns from the horns and the second a solo feature for the pianist. "Weird Knock" works off Okegwo's