



University of North Texas Two O'Clock Lab Band

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North Texas Two O'Clock Lab Band

Denton, Texas Jazz Giant

North Texas Jazz 2009

Denton, Texas Jazz Giant, the third of four albums by the University of North Texas Two O'Clock Lab Band to be reviewed here in chronological order, covers the years 2007-08 and is the last to be presided over by the band's recently retired director, James Riggs. Not to belabor the point, which has been made before, but there's not enough space between UNT's various Lab Bands, especially the One O'Clock and Two O'Clock ensembles, to squeeze in a page from one of their charts.

The Class of 2007 is featured on two numbers, **Louie Bellson's** turbulent "Quiet Riot" and Dave Richards' glittering "Starscream," sandwiched around half a dozen others by the Class of 2008. As the personnel is largely unchanged, the ensembles are basically one and the same, in their approach to the music and the superior manner in which it is performed. One doesn't advance through the ranks to become a member of the Two O'Clock Lab Band by sitting on his or her hands. This first-rate group of undergraduate overachievers could turn pro today and earn immediate credibility.

The 2008 ensemble embraces four standards (five, if you count **Phil Kelly's** "Play Tonic Budz," his clever variation on "Just Friends") and one original, **Chuck Owen's** "A Quiet Longing." The standards are Rodgers and Hart's "My Funny Valentine," Johnny Green's "Body and Soul," Johnny Mercer / Jimmy Van Heusen's "I Thought About You" (marvelously played) and Cole Porter's "Night and Day," the last taken at slightly less than warp speed to punctuate a searing "tenor battle" between Sylvester Onyejiaka and Carlos Espinosa. Espinosa is featured with trumpeter Clink Yerkes on "Tonic Budz," Onyejiaka with pianist Ben Haugland on "Longing," and pianist Roberto Verastegui, alto Brian Girley, trumpeter Thomas Eby and drummer Ryan Jacobi on "Riot." Baritone saxophonist Aaron Lovato is the lone soloist on "Body and Soul." (Albuquerque residents, by the way, are happy to have Lovato back "home," where he sits in occasionally with the Albuquerque Jazz Orchestra on baritone and / or alto.)

Riggs, who has left the Two O'Clock Band in the capable hands of Jay Saunders, deserves high praise for his dedicated work in making the ensemble one that UNT and others can point to with pride and admiration. As for *Denton, Texas Jazz Giant*, what better phrase can one envision with which to epitomize the awesome Two O'Clock Lab Band.