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Fax: (914) 762-8649
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**JASON RIGBY &
DETROIT-CLEVELAND TRIO**
One

Jason Rigby, tenor & soprano saxophones;
Cameron Brown, bass; Gerald Cleaver, drums
Fresh Sound New Talent 505 (CD). 2016. Jason
Rigby, prod.; Aaron Nevezie, eng. DDD? TT: 52:11

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

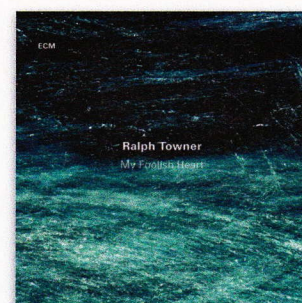
SONICS ★★★★★

Though not prolific as a leader, Jason Rigby has made a mark as an especially fine if underrated tenor saxophonist. *One* is his first release since *The Sage* (2008), and only his third since *Translucent Space* (2006). The earlier dates respectively found Rigby leading a quintet and an ensemble with woodwinds and cello. *One*, by contrast, is a bare-bones trio, and far more raw.

Bassist Cameron Brown, who played on *The Sage* and *Translucent Space*, is a native of Detroit, as is drummer Gerald Cleaver (who also played on *The Sage*). Rigby is originally from Cleveland—the Midwest connection gives the trio its name and perhaps informs its aesthetic. But the improvisational fire sounds very like New York, where the session was recorded. There's not so much as a hint of reverb on the horn. The drums are presented with a wide and satisfying stereo image. The bass, unfortunately, is panned hard right, making Brown's playing fainter than the rest and throwing the mix off kilter.

The warmth of Rigby's tone and the rigor of his ideas come across even in the stormiest free blowing. The leadoff tenor-drum duet, "Dive Bar," and the originals "Live by the Sword" and "Dewey," are suffused with the exploratory energy of the 1970s loft scene. Rigby is also radiant in the unaccompanied "Embraceable You," and steeped in the tradition in the Rodgers & Hart ballad "You Are Too Beautiful." Switching to soprano for Herbie Hancock's "Speak Like a Child," he roams freely through that tune's shadowy, expansive interiors.

—David R. Adler



RALPH TOWNER
My Foolish Heart

Ralph Towner, classical & 12-string guitars
ECM 2516 (CD). 2017. Manfred Eicher, prod.;
Stefano Amerio, eng. DDD. TT: 40:26

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

Ralph Towner's return to solo-guitar work is cause for celebration. His completely original approach to playing classical and 12-string guitar combines his wonderfully relaxed, conversational flow of melodic statements and improvisations with a harmonic logic that is emotionally rewarding yet startling in its virtuosity, like watching a monarch butterfly dancing its way through a sun-dappled garden.

Towner has epitomized the branch of fusion jazz that is more about cross-generic influences than amplification, an approach exemplified by his groundbreaking chamber-jazz band Oregon and championed by producer Manfred Eicher, whose ECM label maps the DMZ between jazz and classical music. Towner here includes a couple of reinterpretations of Oregon gems: "Shard" and "Rewind."

The only tune not by Towner is the title track, which offers tribute to Bill Evans, one of Towner's earliest influences—he began as a pianist, and still regards his approach to guitar playing as "pianistic." The song was first released in 1949, when it appeared in the film of that title, and was reanimated by Evans as an erotic dreamscape on his classic album *Waltz for Debby* (1962). Evans seemed to suspend time in his reading, an aesthetic that some fans have amplified into a cult following that evokes visions of symbolist poets and sweet narcosis. But Evans needed no such aids to arrive at this imaginative landscape, and Towner's spiritually charged homage underscores that truth.

Towner also pays tribute to another pianist, Paul Bley, in the beautiful "Blue as in Bley," "Pilgrim," "Saunter," "I'll Sing to You," and "Clarion Call" are other highlights. —John Swenson