



## Joe Farnsworth *In What Direction Are You Headed?*

SMOKE SESSIONS

★★★★½

The talent drummer Joe Farnsworth brings to *In What Direction Are You Headed?* alone guarantees superlative music. It also comprises three generations — bassist Robert Hurst is a boomer, Farnsworth and guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel Gen-Xers, saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins and pianist Julius Rodriguez Gen-Zers. They manage to meet in the same forward-looking space and create something special.

## Steve Smith and Vital Information *Time Flies*

WOUNDED BIRD

★★★★

Steve Smith's excursions during the '80s with his fusion juggernaut Vital Information were reissued last year by Wounded Bird as a four-CD set, *The Complete Columbia Recordings*. The current edition of the group, based around the core trio of drummer Smith, pianist Manuel Valera and electric bassist Janet Gwizdala, showcases its versatility and superb musicianship on this potent two-CD set.

The authoritative opener, "Emergence," is a power-precision number reminiscent of Tony Williams Lifetime's *Emergency*, with Manuel Valera doubling on piano and synths. Their swinging piano trio rendition of Bud Powell's "Tempus Fugue-It" highlights Smith's adeptness with brushes before switching to sticks and engaging in torrid exchanges with pianist Valera. Their take on Bud's "Un Poco Loco" is full of thrills, while the intense "Choreography In Six" recalls Dave Weckl's precision drumming alongside bassist Anthony Jackson in pianist Michel Camilo's '80s trio.

Saxophonist George Garzone joins the trio on McCoy Tyner's "Inception" then takes on

The front line of Wilkins and Rosenwinkel is magnificent. Roughly a fourth of Wilkins' "Composition 4" is their gorgeous contrapuntal duo intro. They also create sensitive interplay on Rosenwinkel's "Terra Nova," have a joyfully funky convergence with Rodriguez's Fender Rhodes on the title track and bring an eerie soundscape to "Safe Corners." But their fine work together also applies to what they do separately. The affecting closer, Donny Hathaway's "Someday We'll All Be Free," finds Wilkins beautifully in duet with Rodriguez, followed by a marathon theme and solo from Rosenwinkel against the rhythm section, a solo from Wilkins and one from Rodriguez.

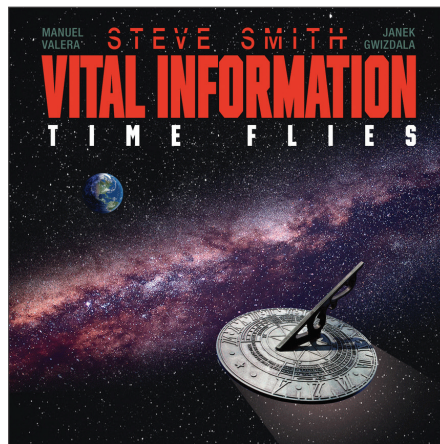
If this sounds as if the rhythm section is secondary or understated, it isn't. Rodriguez is vital; Hurst exudes quiet but palpable authority and Farnsworth plays an extended solo on "Filters" that suggests he's hiding a third arm somewhere. The true zenith of *In What Direction Are You Headed*, however, comes in the lightning bolt that is "Anyone But You," a blast of should-be-impossible fast swing.

—Michael J. West

**In What Direction Are You Headed?:** Terra Nova; Filters; In What Direction Are You Headed?; Composition 4; Anyone But You; Safe Corners; Bobby No Bags; Someday We'll All Be Free. (61:54)

**Personnel:** Joe Farnsworth, drums; Immanuel Wilkins, alto saxophone; Kurt Rosenwinkel, guitar; Julius Rodriguez, piano, Fender Rhodes (3); Robert Hurst, bass.

**Ordering info:** [smokesessionsrecords.com](http://smokesessionsrecords.com)



prisoners "What Is This Thing Called Love" and on Trane's "One Down, One Up." Smith displays his masterful command of brushes on a swinging "Darn That Dream." The bonus CD consists of an eight-part suite, "A Prayer For The Generations," a collective improvisation with a nod to Joe Zawinul's "Directions" along the way.

—Bill Milkowski

**Time Flies:** Emergence; Tempus Fugue-It; Time Flies; Darn That Dream; Un Poco Loco; Self Portrait; Inception; Choreography In Six; No Qualm; Ugly Beauty; What Is This Thing Called Love?; Erdnase; One Down, One Up; A Prayer For The Generations, Parts 1–8. (59:59/53:26)

**Personnel:** Steve Smith, drums; Manuel Valera, piano, keyboards; Janet Gwizdala, electric bass; Mike Mainieri, vibraphone (9); George Garzone, tenor saxophone (3, 7, 11, 13, 14–21).

**Ordering info:** [vitalinformation.com](http://vitalinformation.com)



## Sex Mob *The Hard Way*

CORBETT VS. DEMPSEY

★★★★½

Sex Mob — the quartet of slide trumpet player Steven Bernstein, saxophonist Briggan Krauss, bassist Tony Scherr, and drummer Kenny Wollesen — has always been a band with ideas. But, after more than a quarter century of activity, this might be their weirdest, wildest album yet.

Producer Scotty Hard, who's worked with acts ranging from Medeski, Martin & Wood to Vijay Iyer to avant-noise rap crew New Kingdom to Brazilian funk-rockers Nação Zumbi, is a de facto fifth member here. His electronics and effects take Sex Mob into realms inspired more by hip-hop, dub and Tom Waits' '80s albums than jazz.

The opening "Fletcher Henderdon," in fact, started life as an electronic piece, over which Bernstein and Krauss laid horn melodies. "Banacek," on which Medeski guests, sounds like a potential alternate theme to the obscure 1960s detective show starring George Peppard from which it takes its name, with its thumping beat and "Peter Gunn"-ish horns; Iyer makes a cameo on "You Can Take A Myth," his piano buried under a grotesquely swollen synth bass line and drums that tick and hiss; "Hit The Dirt" adds congas and a stomping hip-hop beat; while "Pepper Pot" is all electronically smeared horns, booming upright bass, the loudest brushed drums ever and metallic clinking sounds bouncing through the stereo field.

The horns have a woozy, warped quality that makes it seem like the ground is shifting beneath your feet, but there's always an anchor. Just don't come in expecting "jazz" and you'll be fine.

—Philip Freeman

**The Hard Way:** Fletcher Henderdon; King Tang; Banacek; Lawn Mower; You Can Take A Myth; Hit The Dirt; Pepper Pot; Tapestral; Club Pythagorean; Dominion. (50:00)

**Personnel:** Steven Bernstein, slide trumpet; Briggan Krauss, alto and baritone saxophones, guitar; Tony Scherr, upright and electric bass, guitar; Kenny Wollesen, acoustic and electric drums; Scotty Hard, electronic beats, soundscapes, synth bass; John Medeski, organ; Vijay Iyer, piano; DJ Olive, turntables.

**Ordering info:** [corbettvsdempsey.com](http://corbettvsdempsey.com)