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Clarity
Laszlo Gardony
(Sunnyside)



Visions (The Music of Stevie Wonder)
Yoron Israel (s/r)

by George Kanzler

A musician's musician, the Hungarian-born American pianist Laszlo Gardony has probably had as much or more influence on music as a longtime professor at Berklee College of Music as he has as a performing artist. Two facets of that career are displayed on these two albums. *Clarity* is a solo outing, an improvised suite recorded in one short session. *Visions* is from the band of drummer Yoron Israel, who has also been a member of Gardony's working trio for a decade.

In his notes on *Clarity*, Gardony says that each piece (10 totaling 50 minutes) "built on and evolved from the previous one." Through the first four tracks, the music seems as schematic as études created by a professor of piano, although the mood is reflective and softly elegiac, resembling Bill Evans' "Peace Piece". But then "Finding Strength" brings a folkish, rhythmic feel to an insistently repeated phrase, a prelude to one of the two tour-de-force highlights, "Better Place", a long piece beginning rhapsodically and tumbling into swinging, momentum-building climaxes. A two-track interlude of more meditative balladry includes "Opened Window", strongly echoing the Victor Young

melody "When I Fall In Love". The other bravura and lengthy track, "Resilient Joy", follows, beginning with a prancing phrase developed over a rhythmic left hand, escalating to second-line rhythm incorporating a panoply of swing piano styles from boogie to stride to rollicking Ray Charles vamps. The suite ends gracefully with the blues-tinged "Resolution (Perfect Place)".

Stevie Wonder's music is very much the co-headliner of *Visions* along with Yoron Israel's High Standards quartet of Gardony, saxophonist Lance Bryant and bassist Ron Mahdi, with occasional guests. "Another Star" opens in a midtempo groove reminiscent of American songbook standards from '50's Miles or Coltrane, Israel's subtle backbeat emphasizing the feel. As on all the eight (of nine) tunes with acoustic piano, the appeal of Wonder's songs, both the infectiously indelible melodies and strong, distinctive harmonies, pervade the sound. Israel daringly stomps out a strong backbeat and heavy drumming, instead of the usual bossa niceties on a bossa/samba version of "Bird of Beauty", Thomas Hogarth's guitar enhancing the mood. "All Is Fair In Love" is a celebration of melody from Israel's brushes, then piano and tenor sax trading choruses and phrases. "You Are the Sunshine of My Life" is just as catchy in an odd 7/4 meter as it was on the original. A fast "Where Were You When I Needed You" alternates swing 4/4 with stutter-time sections, Gardony contributing a frolicking, ebullient solo. He also arranged the outré chart for "Contusion", cast for his electric keyboard, soprano sax and a rhythm section featuring Israel expanding his kit with gongs, chimes and hand cymbals. Hogarth does a credible Wonder tribute on harmonica on the calypso-like "Passionate Teardrops" and Larry Roland intones his own poem over the music of "Visions".

For more information, visit sunnysiderecords.com and yoronisrael.com. Gardony is at Greenwich House Music School Sep. 28th solo and in a trio with Israel. See Calendar.