

DAN McMILLION'S "UP YOUR BRASS" SWINGS HARD

by Wayne Corey (FFS-Wisconsin)

The Dan McMillion Jazz Orchestra is hot. The Florida-based has a new album and I'm running out of superlatives. Suffice to say that the Four Freshmen Society member isn't just getting older, he's blowing hotter! Those of us who love big band blowing are the beneficiaries.

Up Your Brass is the latest McMillion CD and the second to carry the Jazz Orchestra moniker. It is also the second swinger in as many years for the big band-oriented Sea Breeze Jazz label.

The song selection on *Up Your Brass* varies from other recent McMillion band sessions. McMillion offerings have usually been split between standards from the familiar jazz repertoire and a few new or less familiar songs. *Up Your Brass* is top-heavy with unfamiliar songs, some of which have been kicking around for years. Those songs get kicked hard and hot by the McMillion band.

You Got It, arranged and composed by Tom Garling, opens the album. It sounds like a set opener on a hot night in Tampa. Other tracks that come from the songbooks of familiar names include Herbie Hancock's *Dolphin Dance*, *Santurnian Sleigh Ride* from Shorty Rogers, Todd Dameron's *Hot House* and Nick Lane's *Spirit of St. Frederick*, long associated with Maynard Ferguson.

The McMillion band is noted for outstanding solo work and *Up Your Brass* is no exception. Listen to the change of reins in *Sleigh Ride* and you will marvel at the stunning quality of musicians in the band and their ability to play in both tight ensemble and bright solo settings.

Of special note is the interesting Jay Chattaway arrangement of *Maria*, the Leonard Bernstein classic from *West Side Story*. Less breathtaking than Don Sebesky's dramatic chart, it uses McMillion's hot trumpet to great advantage. The track is pushed along by a notably melodic bass line from Chris Queenan. Indeed, Queenan's bass propels numerous tracks. I keep trying to compare him to someone, but I give up. I cranked up my subwoofer to really appreciate what he brings to this album.

Perhaps inevitably for a band that stretches so effectively so frequently, not every song is a winner on *Up Your Brass*. It may be a Bill Holman arrangement but *Norwegian Wood*, the Lennon/McCartney classic, is out of place. Several bands have recorded *Norwegian Wood* and other Beatles songs through the years. *Norwegian Wood* is still an effort by some rock & rollers to write a folk song. They did a good job, but it doesn't translate well to a brass-heavy big band album. *Gonna Fly Now*, the theme from *Rocky* is fine but, frankly, nothing new. We've heard it before and we'll hear it again. It makes for some effective solo swapping. I just don't know if we need one more take of an over-recorded song.

On a surprisingly (to me) happy note, arranger Don Sebesky, who did not do the *Maria* arrangement on *Up Your Brass*, does

supply a remarkable chart of *People*. The song is a piece of overly-dramatic fluff when done by Barbara Streisand but becomes a screaming big band gem in the hands of the McMillion troops. Neat stuff.

Dan McMillion is leading arguably the hottest big band in America today. Four Freshmen Society members will be able to hear the band at our 2003 convention. Meanwhile, buy *Up Your Brass* from the FFS Music Mart and up your listening. Music is the stuff of life for FFS members, and Dan McMillion continues to make my listening life better!

New Import - THE FOUR FRESHMEN: First Affair/Voices in Fun See Music Mart pages 7, 8, 9

Two complete Capitol LPs (from '60 and '61) on this import CD-24 stellar performances by one of the most influential vocal groups of all time! Includes *Polka Dots and Moonbeams*, *I'm Beginning to See the Light*, *Please Be Kind*, *It's a New World*, *Swinging on a Star*, *Happy Talk*, *On the Sunny Side of the Street*, and more! **HYSMG16672 CD**

Happy Birthday Caterina!

This January our friend, Caterina Valente, celebrates her birthday. We are so pleased to wish her continued success and good health! We're so glad you share our passion for THE FRESHMEN SOUND....Franco Bertagnini and all of the FFS (and me, too!...Bob Flanigan)

FOR SALE:

Major collection of Freshmen Newsletters, 31 issues of The Fifth Freshmen (Jan. 1965 Vol. 2 #30 through #3, 1973) and 87 issues of Fresh News (Jan. 1988, Vol. 1 through Vol. 15 #4/current).

Anyone interested may mail their bid to:

Bill Lichtenauer
3533 Lake Shore Drive
JOLIET IL 60431

or email Bill at:
tanprod@aol.com

Bids postmarked after Feb. 7, 2003
will not be considered.