



University of North Texas Two O'Clock Lab Band

Published: November 9, 2009

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North Texas Two O'Clock Lab Band

Avenue 'C' Jazz

North Texas Jazz 2009

Avenue 'C' Jazz is the first of four recently issued CDs by the University of North Texas' impressive Two O'Clock Lab Band to be appraised in this column in chronological order. The first three (2004-08) were overseen by the band's recently retired director, James Riggs, the most recent by his successor, Jay Saunders. Other reviews will follow in December, January and February.

While the university's One O'Clock Lab Band records more often and garners most of the limelight, the difference

between that ensemble and the Two O'Clock Band is so slight as to be almost invisible. In fact, any resemblance between the Two O'Clock Band and a working professional ensemble is undeniable. To put it another way, these young students are seasoned musicians who can stand their ground with anyone at any level.

Their assignments on *Avenue 'C'* are as inclusive as they are precarious, starting with Alan Baylock's dynamic arrangement of **Duke Ellington's** durable "Cottontail" and including compositions and / or arrangements by **Bob Florence, Don Grusin, Jim Knapp, Alf Clausen, Chick Corea, Phil Kelly** and Cole Porter's "Easy to Love," superbly arranged by Charlie Young to showcase the band's nimble-fingered saxophone section. As one would expect from musicians of this caliber (and from a group that was named *DownBeat* magazine's best college band in 2005), the Class of 2004-06 aces every one of them, apparently with no undue stress or strain.

"Cottontail," Florence's breezy "Bebop Charlie" and Grusin's airy "Water Wings" are superbly performed by the Spring 2004 ensemble, "Easy to Love," Knapp's spirited "Secular Breathing," Corea's fidgety "Life Line" and Florence's torrid arrangement of "Just Friends" by the 2005 band, Clausen's amorous "For Her" and Kelly's soulful "Bluelonious" and New Orleans-style "Pleading Diminished Capacity" by the 2006 ensemble. Comparisons are pointless, as each group plays with remarkable proficiency and poise as a unit while the soloists are invariably sharp and engaging.

Recording quality is excellent, which is especially helpful to bassists Danny Stone, Matt Blaize and Joe Johnson whose clearly articulated pulse helps anchor the three grade-A rhythm sections. If the time has come for you to hear a truly electrifying college-level big band, it must be Two O'Clock.