

Bio

Roy Hargrove

*Earfood*

Groovin'High/Emarcy Records

"This recording was made to bring *sonic pleasure* to the listener," writes trumpeter/bandleader Roy Hargrove in the liner notes to his sublime new CD, *Earfood*, on Groovin' High/Emarcy Records. "Simple melodies moving around luscious chords allow [my working quintet] to capture attention and give a feeling of *transcendence*." Nicknaming the album *Sound Nutrition*, Hargrove delivers a 13-song collection of nutritious post-bop jazz that includes seven of his originals and six covers that range from the upbeat Cedar Walton crowd-pleaser "I'm Not So Sure" that opens the CD to the New Orleans-styled endsong, Sam Cooke's "Bring It On Home to Me."

"This is my favorite way to play," says Hargrove, who, at 38, is one of a handful of jazz artists of his generation who have deservedly attained critical and commercial star status. "I like playing music that's considered classic jazz, especially now when it's hard to find musicians who deal with the jazz tradition. So many people are playing the 'new and improved' jazz, which alienates a lot of the audience. I'm not afraid to play the blues and soul, and I like to try to be innovative. But I prefer the standards sound. If you get too far from that, what's the point?"

In the liners, Hargrove sets out his vision for *Earfood*: "My goal in this project is to have a recording that is steeped in tradition and sophistication, while maintaining a sense of melodic simplicity."

Vital to the success of *Earfood* is Hargrove's road-warriors quintet, comprising Justin Robinson on alto sax and flute, Gerald Clayton on piano, Danton Boller on bass and Montez Coleman on drums. "We've all been on tour so much that we have a special cohesiveness," says Hargrove. "We've all come to know each other really well the more we've played together. They all have a good attitude and we travel well together, which makes a big difference." Hargrove pauses, then jokes, "No one overpacks except me."

In his *Earfood* liners, Hargrove notes that the band's closeness was one of the "key elements in developing a tight sound, [with] less time wasted in the studio." And while in the sessions, Hargrove was supported by the legendary engineer Al Schmitt, who he says allowed him and the band to completely focus on the music and forget the technical side. "I was introduced to Al by my manager, almost 10 years ago" says Hargrove. "I didn't know him, but then I realized that he was a part of all my favorite recordings. He's the best there is. He stayed out of the way, but whatever happened in the studio he caught on tape. Al let the music speak for itself."

The Hargrove originals are a wonderful mixed bag of gemlike ballads and gentle swingers. Played on a mute trumpet, "Brown" is a catchy melody teeming with sophisticated harmonic movement. Originally written for the Directions in Music tour he did with Herbie Hancock and Michael Brecker, "Brown" (named so because Hargrove wrote it on a brown piano) was rearranged and reharmonized by Hancock. It's followed by the spirited "Strasbourg/St.Denis," which features a spiral sax/trumpet dance. "Everyone likes this tune," Hargrove says. "It's one of my favorites too. This song came to me a dream in a one-and-a-half-star hotel in Paris. I woke up in the middle of the night and wrote it down."

Hargrove also delivers the swinging "The Stinger" ("It's written for all the people in the world who let things fly out of their mouths before thinking," he says) and the walking bass-driven "Style" (written on the piano in an old opera hall in Orvieto, Italy, and called "Style" in tribute to the way Italians "dress and eat, where it's always an event").

The other originals are pensive, reflective, balladic. Hargrove says, "More and more my writing is leaning toward slow songs. It's my favorite way to play. Give me a nice ballad that's pretty and I'm cool." The title of the beautiful "Joy Is Sorrow Unmasked" comes from poet/philosopher Kahlil Gibran's book *The Prophet*, which inspired the melody; "Rouge" is Hargrove's experiment with writing a tune without tempo that expressed colors, especially his favorite, red; and "Divine," his most recent composition was written on the piano with a descending line when he was "just trying to write something pretty."

Each of the nonoriginal tunes Hargrove brings to *Earfood* is tied in with personal history. He learned the Walton number in 2000 when he played a weeklong gig with the piano master at the Village Vanguard. "Cedar just had a skeleton of this tune to play from," Hargrove says. "It took me a couple of nights to learn it and make it stick. I figured it out, but at first it was here we go, jump in and sink or swim. The audience loves this song." The Kurt Weill-Ogden Nash tune "Speak Low" brings Hargrove (on flugelhorn) back to one of his favorite performers, vocalist Sarah Vaughan: "I loved her voice, choice of tunes and delivery," he says. "She was an influence on my playing."

The slow-tempo "Starmaker," written by Lou Marini, was introduced to Hargrove by his manager several years ago ("It makes me think of 'The Theme from M\*A\*S\*H,'" he says), and the midtempo beauty "To Wisdom the Prize" is a tune from the pen of ex-band member Larry Willis ("Larry was one of my teachers," says Hargrove. "He graced us with his presence for six years"). The funk-inflected "Mr. Clean," written by Weldon Irvine Jr., comes from one of Hargrove's favorite albums, Freddie Hubbard's 1970 masterpiece, *Straight Life*. "Freddie was my hero on the trumpet," says Hargrove. "When I first heard him, I tried to emulate him. He had a very classic style that went back to Clifford Brown as well as had a contemporary edge. I always tried to play like him...and I still am." On that tune Hargrove reaches to the sonic stratosphere with his trumpet solo and Clayton frolics on the keys.

The *Earfood* finale is the only live track on the CD: Sam Cooke's "Bring It On Home to Me," recorded in Gleisdorf, Austria. Clayton plays a churchy piano and Hargrove leads the brass exhilaration. "I'm definitely into Sam Cooke," he says. "I read his biography a few years back and then listened to everything he recorded. I love this tune."

Discovered by Wynton Marsalis who heard him perform at his high school, Booker T. Washington School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas, Hargrove recorded his first solo album in 1990, *Diamond in the Rough*, on Novus/RCA. He recorded four more with the label before signing with Verve, where he recorded several top-tier albums (including *With the Tenors of Our Time* with various tenor saxophonists and the Grammy Award-winning *Habana* with his Afro-Cuban band Crisol). In addition to critically acclaimed classic jazz albums, Hargrove also experimented with a contemporary jazz band, The RH Factor, which applies elements of hip-hop, funk, soul and gospel music into the rarefied jazz mix.

"Being a musician is a gift," says Hargrove, who is arguably the hardest working and most active musician in the jazz world—whether he's on tour with his quintet or RH Factor bands, regularly fronting his big band at the Jazz Gallery in New York, or doing guest appearances at concerts ranging from the May 2008 hip-hop-meets-jazz summit in Paris with legendary jazz bassist Ron Carter and French rapper MC Solaar to a June 2008 celebration of Hank Jones' 90<sup>th</sup> birthday at the JVC Jazz Festival in New York.

As for *Earfood*, his maiden voyage on Groovin'High/Emarcy, Hargrove says with pride, "I wanted to make music that lasts awhile, to make an album that people can enjoy for a lot longer than one month." He adds in his liners, "I hope the pleasure in listening to the results is commensurate with the pleasure we had during the process."

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