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Review

Linley Hamilton Quintet

For The Record



by **Ian Mann**

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/ ALBUM

With the focus on superior original material a lot of thought and care has gone into this recording, and as leader Hamilton can take great pride in the success of this “lifetime ambition”.

Linley Hamilton Quintet

“For The Record”

(Teddy D Records TDC002)

Linley Hamilton – trumpet, flugelhorn, Derek O’Connor – tenor sax, Cian Boylan – piano, organ

Mark Egan – bass, Adam Nussbaum – drums

Trumpeter Linley Hamilton – or Dr. Linley Hamilton to give him his full title – is one of Ireland’s leading jazz musicians. In addition to this he is a Professor of Music at Ulster University’s Magee Campus and a respected broadcaster, hosting jazz programmes on BBC Radio Ulster.

As well as releasing several albums under his own name Hamilton has also worked as a session musician, performing several times with Van Morrison and appearing on recordings by folk singers Eleanor McEvoy and Paul Brady. Hamilton has also recorded with jazz vocalists Jacqui Dankworth and Dana Masters and performed with saxophonists Jean Toussaint and Ken Peplowski.

Others with whom he has been associated include Northern Irish singer-songwriter Foy Vance and the Commitments touring band.

I first became aware of Hamilton's playing in 2011 when I reviewed the quartet album "Taylor Made", named for the group's pianist Johnny Taylor, who contributed many of the arrangements for the collection of standards and pop covers that made up the album. The quartet was completed by bassist Dan Bodwell, an American then living in Dublin, and drummer Dominic Mullan.

My review of that recording can be read here;

<https://www.thejazzmann.com/reviews/review/linley-hamilton-taylor-made>

Although not overly ambitious "Taylor Made" was a classy piece of work that included some excellent playing and a superior production. These qualities also apply to this latest recording, which features an international line up including the American rhythm section of bassist Mark Egan and drummer Adam Nussbaum.

Hamilton has described this new album as the "fulfilment of a lifetime ambition". Egan and Nussbaum represent two of his all time musical heroes and he was lucky enough to be able to meet them through radio interviews and through his annual involvement with the Sligo Jazz Project, where the pair were visiting tutors. The trumpeter suggested forming a band, something to which both agreed, and a four date Northern Irish tour was booked. Joining Hamilton, Egan and Nussbaum in the project were two of Hamilton's oldest friends, tenor saxophonist Derek 'Doc' O'Connor and pianist Cian Boylan.

Boylan appears to have taken over Taylor's role as Hamilton's 'musical right hand man'. Boylan was responsible for the arrangements on Hamilton's previous album "Making Other Arrangements", a recording featuring a jazz rhythm section plus orchestra. In a programme with the focus on original material Boylan fills a similar role here and is also credited as the composer or co-composer of four of the album's eight tracks. He really is a key part of the record's success.

The music was written in advance of the tour and composed specifically for this line up, with individual charts being sent out to the musicians concerned. The project was a year in the making but this ensured that when they came to perform live the quintet hit the ground running, ensuring that the tour was a considerable success. Hamilton also booked studio time to ensure that this 'once in a lifetime' project was documented on disc. The album was recorded at Camden Recording Studios in Dublin with Boylan acting as co-producer alongside engineer Conor Brady. Such was Brady's contribution that he gets credited as a band member in the album packaging - he doesn't get to be in the group photos though!

Brady makes his mark from the outset, with a bright, clear mix that brings out the energy and vivaciousness of the musicians' performances. The album commences with Boylan's composition "Right Angle", appropriately introduced by a reflective passage of solo piano from its creator. But this proves to be the calm before the storm as the piece erupts into a kind of fiery hard bop featuring some excellent interplay between Hamilton on trumpet and O'Connor on tenor as Boylan, Egan and Nussbaum combine to create an unstoppable rhythmic juggernaut. Hamilton sets his stall out early with a blazing trumpet solo that contrasts neatly with a more contemplative episode from Boylan. The juggernaut kicks into life once more with O'Connor's impassioned solo, this containing a lengthy passage which teams the sax man with Nussbaum only, the American more than holding his own with some volcanic drumming. A rousing closing section finds Hamilton and O'Connor going head to head as the dynamic rhythm section continue to stoke the fires. It all makes for a terrific, high energy, attention grabbing intro.

Boylan also contributes "Mo' Hip", a gentler, but no less engaging, composition and one that gives greater prominence to Egan's supple, fluid electric bass. Hamilton leads off the solos once more as the piece gathers momentum, it may be a little less frenetic than the opener but it is still packed with energy and interest. The excellent Boylan again follows, and then O'Connor, this time in more contemplative mood, but with his sound becoming more urgent and hard edged as his solo progresses.

The only true 'outside' item is a delightful ballad interpretation of the Beatles song "And I Love Her", introduced by a solo cadenza from Hamilton. The piece is an excellent example of Hamilton's abilities as an interpreter of 'pop' material and of his ballad skills. Boylan responds with a flowingly lyrical piano solo, while the usually ebullient Nussbaum displays admirable restraint with some deft and delicate brushwork. Egan adds a liquidly lyrical electric bass solo. The bassist first came to the attention of the wider jazz public in the late 1970s as a member of the first edition of the Pat Metheny Group, making excellent contributions to the ECM albums "Pat Metheny Group" (1978) and "American Garage" (1979). He has since enjoyed a long and productive career releasing a dozen solo albums and also recording prolifically with ex PMG drummer Dan Gottlieb in the group Elements. He has also been a prolific sideman and has appeared on around two hundred albums. Egan may have dropped off my personal jazz radar after his Metheny days but he has been far from idle!

"Split" is a joint composition by Hamilton and Boylan and is another slice of energetic, hard bop flavoured music. The punchy theme provides soloing opportunities for both Hamilton and O'Connor who both blow with considerable gusto. Boylan doubles on piano and organ and gets to solo on both.

"Origin" is a piece composed by Hamilton's former pianist Johnny Taylor. It's a ballad that slows the pace down again and provides another platform for Egan's languid, lyrical electric bass. Hamilton solos with great fluency and elegance, evoking comparisons with Kenny Wheeler, and with an increasing intensity as Taylor's tune takes on something of an anthemic quality.

Nussbaum is best known to British jazz audiences as a member of the Anglo-American supergroup The Impossible Gentlemen, featuring pianist Gwilym Simcock, guitarist Mike Walker, bassists Steve Swallow and/or Steve Rodby and, more recently, saxophonist Iain Dixon.

Nussbaum gives an impressive performance on Taylor's "Origin", responding adroitly to the tune's narrative and dynamics. He then takes over the compositional chair for "Sure Would Baby", a blues based tune originally performed by The Impossible Gentlemen. It's interesting to hear the tune

given a different treatment with the two horns replacing Walker's guitar. A slowed down arrangement features Boylan doubling on piano and organ as Hamilton takes the first solo, smouldering purposefully on trumpet. Boylan follows on piano and then O'Connor on raunchy tenor as the piece gathers momentum. Although relatively simple in comparison to the majority of the Impossible Gentlemen material Nussbaum's tune has proved to be a robust and versatile composition that continues to impress in its new guise.

Egan's contribution with the pen is "Sea Saw", a piece from his 2010 album "Truth Be Told", released on his own Wavetone record label. Ironically Egan started out as a trumpeter before deciding to specialise on electric bass, initially inspired by Jaco Pastorius. It has the feel of a 'fusion' piece, written for electric instruments but transferred to an acoustic setting. The new context brings a welcome warmth to the music with Hamilton taking the first solo, followed by the composer's trademark fretless electric bass. The piece also includes something of a feature for Nussbaum at the drums.

The album closes on an upbeat note with "Holly's Moment", a composition written jointly by Hamilton and Boylan to celebrate the birth of O'Connor's young daughter Holly. However the saxophonist's joy was tempered by the loss of his sister, Maureen, to whom the album as a whole is dedicated. But "Holly's Moment" is above all a celebration and a gently propulsive bass and drum groove provides the basis for fluent solos from proud father O' O'Connor on warm toned, but still incisive tenor, the inventive Boylan at the piano and Egan on electric bass. Finally we here from Hamilton himself with an uplifting trumpet solo while Nussbaum enjoys a last flourish at the drums.

Under Hamilton's benign leadership the Irish and American musicians appear to gel really quickly and strike up an excellent rapport. The focus on superior original material ensures that the album is far more than an all star, by rote, blowing session. A lot of thought and care has gone into this recording with Boylan, in particular, emerging with great credit as keyboard player, composer and arranger. Engineer Brady also deserves praise for ensuring that all five musicians are heard at their best. The Irish contingent certainly rise to the challenge and as leader Hamilton can take great pride in the success of this "lifetime ambition".

