



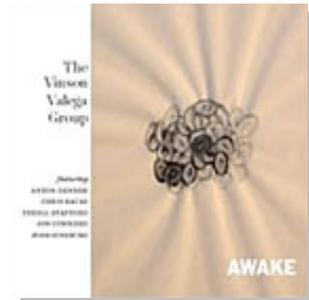
Awake

Vinson Valega Group | Consilience Productions (2006)

By Mark F. Turner

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The underlying message inside Vinson Valega's *Awake* summons a quiet call to social and political awareness, just as past artists have done like saxophonist Sonny Rollins' *Freedom Suite* (Riverside, 1958). But for the activist and the pacifist alike, the message in this new release is clear and to the point—with music that is conscientious, alive, and immersive.

A few things have changed since Valega's last recording *Consilience* (Consilience Productions, 2003). As the previous release featured the drummer in a trio setting, the new recording finds him leading an extremely tight sextet. Things have naturally opened up with the addition of piano and three horns, including trumpeter Terell Stafford. Giving way to wider and more melodic tunes, the sextet covers eleven originals (by various band members) and the lovely "Take Time for Love," written by pianist James Williams (to whom the CD is dedicated).

Some things have not changed. Valega is still one of the most swinging drummers around, with snappy trap-work, and an ear for compositions that carry a sense of cool freedom, bringing to mind the 1960s modal sounds in a contemporary setting. Smooth horn arrangements, tight rhythms, and detailed solos, are found on personal favorites such as the title piece "Awake" and "Undertow," written by and featuring bassist Josh Ginsburg.

Democracy in action is witnessed as each musician exchanges ideas, collaborates, and works together to bring something to the process. This is heard on "Sputnik," which has a Coltrane-like "Giant Steps" vamp as Anton Denner's piccolo, Chris Bacas' soprano sax, and Stafford's trumpet feverishly swirl together, segueing nicely into the third part of "This is What Democracy Sounds Like." If only our political system could work in such harmony.

The recording nears the end with the suave "The Trend Is Your Friend", boasting proud solos from everyone. But the cherry on top comes on "Take Time for Love," a poignantly soulful ballad where each instrument's voice is suffused with the shimmer of Valega's percussion. *Awake* is just one example that would remind us to not only be aware of our social environment, but to also be cognizant of the rich music that we call jazz.

Track listing: Luftmenschen; Awake; Fog; This is What Democracy Sounds Like; Undertow; Ed Blackwell; This is What Democracy Sounds Like [Part II]; Stacked Sienna; Sputnik; This is What Democracy Sounds Like [Part III]; The Trend is Your Friend; Take Time for Love.

Personnel: Vinson Valega: drums; Anton Denner: alto saxophone, piccolo; Chris Bacas: tenor and soprano saxophones, clarinet; Terell Stafford: trumpet; Jon Cowherd: piano; Josh Ginsburg: bass.