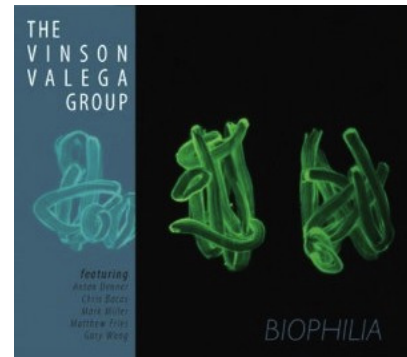


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**The Vinson Valega Group
"Biophilia"
Consilience Productions
March 2010**

By Brad Walseth



NYC-based drummer Valega is a leader of an artist-based Web site called "Consilience Productions" - named after William Whewell and socio-biologist Edmund O. Wilson's term - "consilience" - meaning "unity of knowledge." This wouldn't be relevant except that the music that Valega and his band members have composed for this release seems to follow that philosophy so well musically in that traditional jazz styles are merged with modern songwriting to create an engaging new whole. Original works are joined by numbers from Duke Ellington, Irving Berlin, Thelonous Monk and Ornette Coleman. So for example - the album starts off with talented keyboardist Matthew Fries' jumpy "I Knew You'd Say That" and then moves into a loving version of Ellington's "Sunset and the Mockingbird" before moving into a free jazz intro to Valega's "A Moment of Silence." This dichotomy of old and new "knowledge," along with the contrast of freedom and form inherent in jazz are presented with extreme care by the musicians working in consort to create a satisfying and unified presentation.

The interplay between all of the musicians is quite organic - Valega and bassist Gary Wang have a great rapport, pianist Fries an important component to the sound, and the front line section of Anton Denner (alto and flute), Chris Bacas (tenor and soprano) and Mark Miller (trombone) are highly successful in creating a plethora of colors, while bridging the gap between divergent styles. Neither are cultural differences/similarities

ignored, as the 0:55 title track (?!) exhibits an overt African-influence, and Miller's "Let" reveals a European chamber feel. In perhaps the most blatant and successful mergers - the band manages to combine the old standard "Day by Day" with Coleman's "Kathelin Gray." This album includes many interesting and melodic compositions including "I Just Wanted to See What You Look Like," "November Spring," an enjoyable waltzing "Always," the gnarly "Talk Time," a swinging "Think of One" and some short interludes by Valega that cross genre, defy expectations and entertain and reward the listener - ending with the Latin-flavored "Doesn't it Feel Great to be Alive" - which seems to sum up the philosophy of Valega and his cohorts well.

www.cslproductions.org