

## ON CHRIS ABRAHAMS

by Mark Bazeley

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[Mark Bazeley reviews the album *Piano*, released on Hot Records (HTLO 1014) in 1985. This review appeared in the Summer/Autumn 1986 edition of *Jazz Magazine*.]



**T**his first solo album of Chris Abrahams, of The Benders, is a remarkable debut, and certainly worthy of a place in a review alongside Mike Nock. I find it extraordinary that such a young performer can encapsulate such a complete emotional landscape in his compositions. Beside this, his excellent technical ability at the piano rates a secondary mention.

While there are hints of other influences in the music, there is never enough to warrant calling it derivative. Chris Abrahams certainly has an original style, and a very mature style for one who has not had a wide experience of performing in different groups. I would rate this record for quality with the early ECM piano improvisations of Chick Corea.

A yardstick for assessing any performer is his treatment of jazz standards, where comparisons abound. On this album, Abrahams gives a spirited rendition of *Stormy Weather*, full of musical asides and interpolations on top of some very moving chord progressions that give it some diverse colours.

The high points of the album for me are not the show-pieces of technical bravura, but the quieter, more contemplative mood-pieces, notably *The Island* and *CFD*. *The Island* is a long, reflective, chordal development carried along by a very appropriate, lilting tempo. As a mood-piece it is satisfyingly complete. *CFD* is cast in a similar vein, being a slow, chordal exploration which has the cumulative effect of a feeling of tranquillity.



*Chris Abrahams: exercises in technical skill and ingenious ideas encased in complex rhythmical matrices... PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR*

The other facet of this album is that of the showman — exercises in technical skill and ingenious ideas encased in complex rhythmical matrices. *Upside Down*, for example, is a post-Bachian exercise in composition that is nothing short of brilliant. In a similar vein is *Hyperkinesis*, with cascading arpeggios underpinned by a strong, driving rhythm.

As I said initially, the hallmark of Chris Abrahams' achievement is his ability to make such technically ingenious exercises emotionally satisfying at the same time. I would also commend the titles of the improvisations; they are titles that, for once, add something to the music.

Technically, the pressing is good, except for slight distortion on the treble peaks, and some muddiness in the climactic runs in *Distance*. All in all, this is a record well worth buying.

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