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## **JON HUNT ALBUM: HOUSE RENT BLUES**

**Reviewed by Eric Myers**

**Label: Independent JH\_20201**

**Personnel: Jon Hunt (clarinet; soprano, alto & baritone saxophones); Hannah Gill (vocals on two tracks); Brendan Lanighan (trombone); Josh Dunn (guitar); Eric Metzgar (drums), Vince Giordano (bass & bass saxophone), Matthew Sheens (piano).**

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**T**his impressive album is from Jon Hunt, a sophisticated musician originally from Adelaide, who plays clarinet and saxophones in traditional and swing styles. He holds a PhD from Adelaide's Elder Conservatorium of Music where he taught clarinet for six years. Moving to Melbourne in 2013, he went on to the US in 2017, where he's been playing in what one might call the pre-bebop scene, in the "mainstream" styles that existed before the bebop revolution of the 1940s, and are still being played today.



*Jon Hunt: a sophisticated musician originally from Adelaide...*

Recorded in January, 2020, in New York, this album features mainly professional American musicians (who are often well-known educators), and two talented Australians: pianist Matthew Sheens, also originally from Adelaide, now living in New York; and guitarist Josh Dunn, originally from Tasmania.



*Australians on this album include pianist Matthew Sheens from Adelaide (above) and guitarist Josh Dunn (below) originally from Tasmania...DUNN PHOTO CREDIT NINA GALICHEVA*



I found the artistic direction of the music here ambiguous. 13 tracks feature standards, all from the pre-1940 era, the oldest being *Some Of These Days*, written in 1910. Most of the others were written during the 1920s, and the most modern is Earle Hagen's *Harlem Nocturne*, written in 1940. Two tunes from the 1920s, *Kansas City*

*Man Blues* and the title track *House Rent Blues* are credited to composer Clarence Williams, but there is evidence that the latter was actually written by Sidney Bechet.

Certainly an affinity with Bechet is suggested by Hunt's use of soprano sax in both tunes, and Giordano's using bass saxophone instead of double bass on these tracks suggests a desire for a more fundamentalist classic jazz flavour. On most tracks, however, the drummer Metzgar uses orthodox cymbal rhythms and backbeats on his snare drum which gives the music a relentless mainstream flavour. The real sparkle in the album's music throughout is provided by Hunt himself and Sheens, exemplified by their clarinet/piano duo rendition of Eubie Blake's evergreen *Memories of You*. In the absence of a rather stolid rhythm section both players express themselves freely in one of the album's most attractive tracks.

Sheens is a brilliant modernist, best-known for his fusion work with Adelaide electric bassist Ross McHenry, but his command of the piano keyboard is such that he handles pre-bebop styles with ease. I felt a similar feeling of satisfaction hearing Hunt's version of *Poor Butterfly*, which he performs beautifully on clarinet, accompanied by guitarist Dunn. The album is worth buying just to savour the superior playing of Hunt and Sheens alone.



*Hannah Gill: her version of Artie Shaw's lovely tune "Moonray" is rather pedestrian...*

For some reason I didn't warm to singer Hannah Gill's two tracks. Her version of Artie Shaw's lovely tune *Moonray* is rather pedestrian, without the charm of the classic version sung by Helen Forrest in 1939. There's nothing particularly wrong with Gill's version of *It's Only a Paper Moon* but vigorous solos from Hunt and the trombonist Lanighan certainly lift the spirit of the listener.

Overall, there's much hot, swinging music on this album which is a joy to hear. Those who enjoy traditional and mainstream jazz styles will find it very familiar.