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Album Review

Pete McCann: Without Question



By Jack Bowers
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Guitarist and composer [Pete McCann](#) pulls out all the stops on *Without Question*, his seventh album as leader, unveiling his singular talents on everything from burners ("Without Question," "Trifecta") to ballads ("I Can Remember," "January," "Lost City"), blues ("Blues for O.M."), burlesque ("Conspiracy Theory"), biting commentary ("Erase the Hate") and borrowed themes ("Lovely Thing"). McCann, a native of Wisconsin who has been a fixture on the New York scene for more than thirty years, is also smart—smart enough, that is, to surround himself with skillful sidemen whose basic purpose is to comprise an unwavering support system.

While the music is not strictly thematic, McCann does write with special people or circumstances in mind. "I Can Remember" is a tribute to the late guitarist [John Abercrombie](#), "Lovely Thing" a contrafact of [Lee Konitz](#)' well-known "Subconscious-Lee," which is in turn a takeoff on the standard "What Is This Thing Called Love." The "O.M." in "Blues for O.M." is another influence, the French classical composer Olivier Messiaen. "Hindsight," written during the Covid-19 pandemic, is a reflection on that time, "Erase the Hate" a message to McCann's fellow citizens who too often do not follow such sound advice.

McCann's bandmates are saxophonist [Steve Wilson](#), who plays alto most of the way, pianist [Henry Hey](#), bassist [Matt Pavolka](#) and drummer [Mark Ferber](#); each of them is quick-witted and on the same page. Wilson is perhaps most impressive on the sunny opener (and title song), while McCann is at his peak there too, on acoustic guitar, and Ferber adds an ardent solo of his own. Ballads pose no problem, as McCann and Co. are superb on "I Can Remember," "January" and "Lost City," another Covid- inspired theme based on a nocturnal drive through the Big Apple during a city-wide lockdown.

Hey is persuasive there, as he is whenever called on to solo. "Lovely Thing" rekindles the dapper spirit of Konitz, dancing merrily along behind buoyant solos by McCann, Wilson and Hey. "Blues for O.M." is another highlight, changing pace but not passion, and leading to the less amiable "Conspiracy Theory," on which McCann plays electric guitar (as he does on "Trifecta"). "Hindsight" is a charming swinger, "Erase the Hate" an earnest and deliberative finale that spirals into dissonance. A restive coda but not irksome enough to minimize what has come before it, which is by and large excellent.

