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MARION MEADOWS REVEALS *SECRETS* ON NEW RELEASE

Saxophonist Marion Meadows is hiding something. Like a deft sleight-of-hand artist, there's always something up his sleeve – something he's not showing you outright – that ultimately reveals itself when the music starts. Somewhere in those mysterious spaces between the notes – at the convergence of melody, harmony and rhythm – the simple treasures and universal truths are laid bare for those whose ears and minds and hearts are open to discover them.

Meadows uncovers some of these hidden mysteries on *Secrets* (HUCD 3150), his new recording on Heads Up International, a division of Concord Music Group, set for worldwide release on April 28th, 2009.

For Meadows, the secrets within the music reveal themselves on a subconscious level – a place where higher reasoning takes a back seat to instinct and intuition. And for as much as Meadows may be the keeper of the secrets, they are often just as much a revelation to him as they are to the listener. “Secrets are things that are kept hidden beneath the surface of our own intellect, our own decision-making,” he says. “They’re these treasures that are often right in front of our eyes and yet we don’t even see them or know they’re there.”

Discovering these unseen treasures requires a more organic approach to the music, says Meadows. “I wanted to incorporate a more live sensibility into the recording process in the making of this record,” he explains. “I wanted to use musicians who have also been part of my live performances. Contemporary jazz artists can get a little caught up in the more stylish side of the recording process, with computers and drum machines and other cutting-edge technology. For as good as all that stuff can sound, there’s an organic element that gets lost. If you move too far in that direction, I think people start to take musicians in this genre – and the genre in general – less seriously as a result.”

Because of this commitment to authenticity, *Secrets* is the real deal from the get-go. The set opens with the title track, a mid-tempo piece that showcases not only Meadows’ expressive sax work but also the shimmering lines of keyboardist and longtime collaborative partner and producer Michael Broening.

Trumpeter Jesse McGuire steps in on the followup track, “Let the Top Down,” and adds a layer of counterpoint to Meadows’ saxophone. The track follows a subtle but consistent backbeat engineered by guitarist Freddie Fox and bassist Mel Brown.

“You Lift My Heart” is a stirring ballad with a spiritual dimension delivered by the seasoned pipes of lead vocalist Charlie Karp. “Charlie is a vocalist who comes from the old school,” says Meadows. “He’s originally a rock singer, but he sings a more spiritual type ballad here alongside a jazz saxophone. This is the kind of track that makes this record – like all my records – an eclectic experience.”

“Sand Dancers” takes on a more exotic sensibility, thanks in large part to the numerous layers of percussion provided by Orly Penate and Tony Verdejo. Meadows’ horn work is augmented on this track by saxophonist Anthony Church and trumpeter Ted Zimmerman.

Vocalist Brian Chartrand steps in on “Friends,” a nostalgic Bobby McFerrin piece interpreted here by a team of players that include old friends as well as newcomers to Meadows’ ever-expanding circle of colleagues: producer/bassist Chip Shearin and keyboardist Rachel Eckroth, guitarist Brian Morgan, trumpeter Jesse McGuire and drummer Steve “Jabari” Kersey. “What an incredible voice Brian has,” says Meadows. “Discovering him was a very special surprise and a treat – another secret that came to the surface in the course of making this record.”

“Urban Angels” owes its ethereal sensibility to the interplay between Meadows’ cascading sax runs and vocalist Philip Hamilton’s atmospheric vocals. All of it rests atop the steady undercurrent set up by Broening’s keyboards and programming.

The same crew on hand for “Friends” – plus guitarist Perry Hughes – reconvenes for the decidedly funky closer, “Here To Stay.” Chip Shearin’s solid bass line is the engine that propels Meadows’ extravagant sax work with enough energy left over to support a laid-back but finely crafted guitar solo from Hughes.

For all of the capable hands on deck, *Secrets* is ultimately about the army of ears on the other side of the musical equation, says Meadows. “When we put these records out, we tend to forget about the fans’ initial response to them,” he says. “We live with these projects from their conception and birth all the way up to the final details of post-production and pressing. In a lot of cases, once it’s done and out the door, we need some distance from it for a few weeks. But at that same time, it’s a fresh new experience for the fans who buy it. They’re saying, ‘What’s this thing going to sound like?’ For them, it’s still a secret. It’s something that has yet to be discovered and explored.”

Listen closely and catch the wisdom in the whisper of *Secrets*.

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