

Kirk Lightsey Trio, "Goodbye Mr. Evans" (Evidence) ★★ ★ 1/2

Kirk Lightsey further establishes 1997 as the year of the pianist in jazz with his release "Goodbye Mr. Evans."

The tribute, of course, is to the prolific pianist Bill Evans, who died in 1980 at age 51. The album's title cut is perhaps the finest ode to Evans, written by sax giant Phil Woods.

The Detroit-born Lightsey's choice of partners is interesting. Tibor Elekes is a bassist who has made his mark in Europe and Famoudou, and Don Moye is a drummer who rarely has performed in a trio setting.

Elekes opens the album with a beautiful solo introduction on Jimmy Heath's "A New Blue" and shines the rest of the way with his rich, mellow tone. His only low point probably isn't Elekes' fault. It occurs on "Habibiba," the lone cut composed by Lightsey. The repetitive Elekes bass-line is nearly identical to that of his backing on the first cut and it becomes distracting.

Moye's opening drum solo nicely kicks off the band's unusual rendition of Eddie Harris' "Freedom Jazz Dance," part of a cut named "Medley," in which the trio glides from piece to piece, also caressing Wayne Shorter's "Pinocchio," the Arthur Freed-Herb Nascio Brown "Temptation," and John Coltrane's "Giant Steps" in 9 1/2 enchanting minutes.

Lightsey is flawless, with a style that is sprightly (Dave Brubeck's "In Your Own Way,") and beautifully meditative ("From Chopin to Chopin," adapted by Elekes).

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— RON FOX