

Dean Schmidt

I Know Nothing

OA2 Records 22032

Dean Schmidt (electric bass), Garey Williams (drums), Julio Jauregui (piano), Steve Rice (piano), Eric Verlinde (piano, rhodes), Brian Kent (tenor sax), Jim Coile (tenor sax), Thomas Marriott (trumpet), Edison Otero (congas), Rafael Quinones (guiro), Gary Gibson (steel pans, vibes, percussion, voice, producer).

By Cynthia Mullis

Actually, Dean Schmidt knows quite a lot. Here, on his first outing as a leader, Schmidt takes advantage of this opportunity to express his musical personality from the driver's seat. Bass players are usually in the position of playing a supportive role while often having an unspoken control of what happens to the music. No horn player ever made a bass player sound bad, but the guy in charge of the musical foundation can make or break a band. Most bassists must seek to find a diplomatic way to exert their influence while staying in the parameters of their role as a side-person. When a bassist becomes a leader with no constraints, the listener gets to find out what they're really thinking. On this OA2 release, we find that Dean has a lot on his mind.

Schmidt is one of the busiest musicians in the Northwest, and has an almost omniscient musical view that comes from occupying the bass chair in numerous working situations. As a result, this CD covers a lot of musical turf. *I Know Nothing* is a thoroughly enjoyable journey through a musical perspective defined by versatility. The program consists of thirteen compositions, ten of which were composed by Schmidt. In these tunes, Schmidt's role ranges from a traditional place in the rhythm section into lead guitar territory. He alternates between heavy bass grooves, walking lines, and serious Tumbao, to playing lead lines, melodic solos and directing the harmonic interaction of each grouping of musicians. Schmidt is a consummate electric bassist and fully demonstrates the capabilities of the instrument as both a guitar and bass. He is well-grounded in the tradition of fretless bass established by Jaco Pastorius, but never remotely sounds like a "poor man's Jaco." In fact, it's easier to say who he does *not* sound like, which is usually a good sign of a unique voice.

The selections that stand out on this recording are the ones where Schmidt provides a lead voice that is integral to the ensemble. On *Suffering Through Beauty, October 10* (by Steve Rice) and *Bolivian Bonita with the Big Watch*, Schmidt gives an intimate performance with engaging guitar-like solos. These tunes have a classical chamber music feel with a hint of Steve Swallow. There are three Latin tunes on the disc that are enjoyable but reveal nothing new about his personality or musical voice. *No Pude, I Know Nothing* and *Eme Efe* are a clever, craftsman-like nod to Schmidt's service in the bands Rhumba Abierto and Tumbao. Throughout the program, there is an organic and transparent groove occurring between Schmidt and Garey Williams, and augmented by the percussionists Edison Otero, Rafael Quinones and Gary Gibson. It's easy to have the sense that Dean has created his perfect rhythmic reality.

Strong compositions and performances mark *The Farewell Song* and *Babek*, and while Schmidt remains in charge of the emotional content, these tunes feature excellent solos by Tom Marriott, Jim Coile and Eric Verlinde. (This not to say that saxophonist Brian Kent is a slouch, because he delivers excellent sax work to the Afro-Cuban tunes, as does pianist Julio Jauregui. Gary Gibson also merits close listening for his vibes work.) Two tunes, *Harry Whodeanie's Magic Impromptu Blues* and *Pop Star*, reveal a goofy sense of humor, although *Blues* is the only tune that warrants staying on the iPod. *Pop Star* sets up Schmidt for a funky Miles-ish performance on *The Days of Guns and Roses*, where he demonstrates that, yes, he in fact plays a form of guitar and, yes, he can rock.

The strongest, most moving tune on this disc is the ballad *Her Smile Will Last a Lifetime*, and its meaning is made more profound in knowing that it was written for his mother. This is a composition that reveals Dean's heart, and the performances by Coile, Verlinde and Williams add to the emotion. It's a beautiful and poetic piece of music.

After a career as a sideman in a seat that sometimes gets taken for granted, it's fun to hear this electric bassist do his thing. The result is a recording that gives us a musical view of what the world could look like if we'd just put the bass player in charge. Regardless of what he may or may not know, after hearing this OA2 release, we the listener will know for certain that Dean Schmidt is a bad-ass "eme efe" when he has his electric bass in hand. ■