



## CONVERSATIONS – Michael Tracy / Harry Pickens

(Sea Breeze Jazz SBJ-3088)

Written By: Thomas Conrad (March 2009)

The most striking feature of this duo recording is its intimacy. *Conversations* not only puts you in the same room with Michael Tracy's saxophones and Harry Pickens's piano – it puts you about five feet away. You hear every nuance of Tracy's pronunciation on his reeds: his intakes of breath and hesitations and phrases that begin as expletives. You think along with Pickens as he listens and responds.

Tracy and Pickens are based in Louisville, KY., where this album was recorded (superbly) by engineer Tim Haertel. Tracy, who teaches at the University of Louisville, has a clarion, classic tone on both tenor and soprano. Appropriately for a professor, there is an internal logic in the way he assembles ideas, even as he digresses far from Sam Rivers's "Beatrice" or Dave Brubeck's "So Wistfully Sad."

Pickens is sometimes too busily contrapuntal (a common pitfall of pianists in duos), but more often he winds around and through Tracy's lines and enhances them, most memorably on "Alfonsina y el Mar." On an album of creative decisions about material, it is the most inspired song choice and the most arresting performance. It is an aching lament by Ariel Ramirez and Felix Luna, dedicated to the Argentinian poet Alfonsina Storni, who committed suicide in 1938 by walking into the sea. It deserves to be a standard. Tracy and Pickens have done their part.