

**MICHAEL TRACY,
GUSTING,
SEA BREEZE 3071.**

Gusting / Jog Left / And Sometimes Why / Alone and Away / In the Hills / Julia's Swing / Sergio / Bern Waltz / Note To Self / Sweet and Lovely. 63:12.

**Tracy, saxes; Phil DeGreg, p; Craig Wagner, g; John Goldsby, b;
Jason Tiemann, d.**

No date specified, probably Louisville, KY.

Jazz educator and saxophonist Michael Tracy weighs in with his first CD as leader. Each member of his quintet has ties to the Louisville, Kentucky area where Tracy directs the Jamey Aebersold Jazz Studies program at the University. Guitarist Craig Wagner and drummer Jason Tiemann are on the Louisville faculty. Pianist Phil DeGreg is over at the Cincinnati Conservatory but guests frequently in Louisville. Bassist John Goldsby, a former student of Tracy's, is currently a member of Germany's WDR Big Band. Their music is a fairly predictable mélange of tricky boppish and fusion tunes, with DeGreg, Goldsby, and Wagner all contributing material. Tracy arranged the lone standard, the closing "Sweet and Lovely."

Guitarist Wagner is the most consistently interesting of the soloists. The energy tends to turn up a notch when he steps forward. He's got a tight, punchy sound, and his eccentric phrasing shows more personality than is heard from Tracy or pianist DeGreg.

Tracy has a nice easy way with the tenor. I like the way he slides into the head of DeGreg's poppy "Alone and Away" with an air of unhurried nonchalance, then keeps that feeling going through his solo. Like too many modern mainstream tenors, though, his extreme upper range is little more than a quick and uncontrolled shriek. His facile soprano avoids the nasality all too commonly associated with the horn.

The music is all very cleanly and professionally played, but with only the occasional burst of excitement. There's nothing wrong with it, really, but there's nothing very memorable either. They save the best for last, with Tracy's Latinish take on "Sweet and Lovely," where the tension/release structure of the chart inspires the group to its most spirited playing on the disc. Maybe they should stick to standards next time out ...

Stuart Kremsky