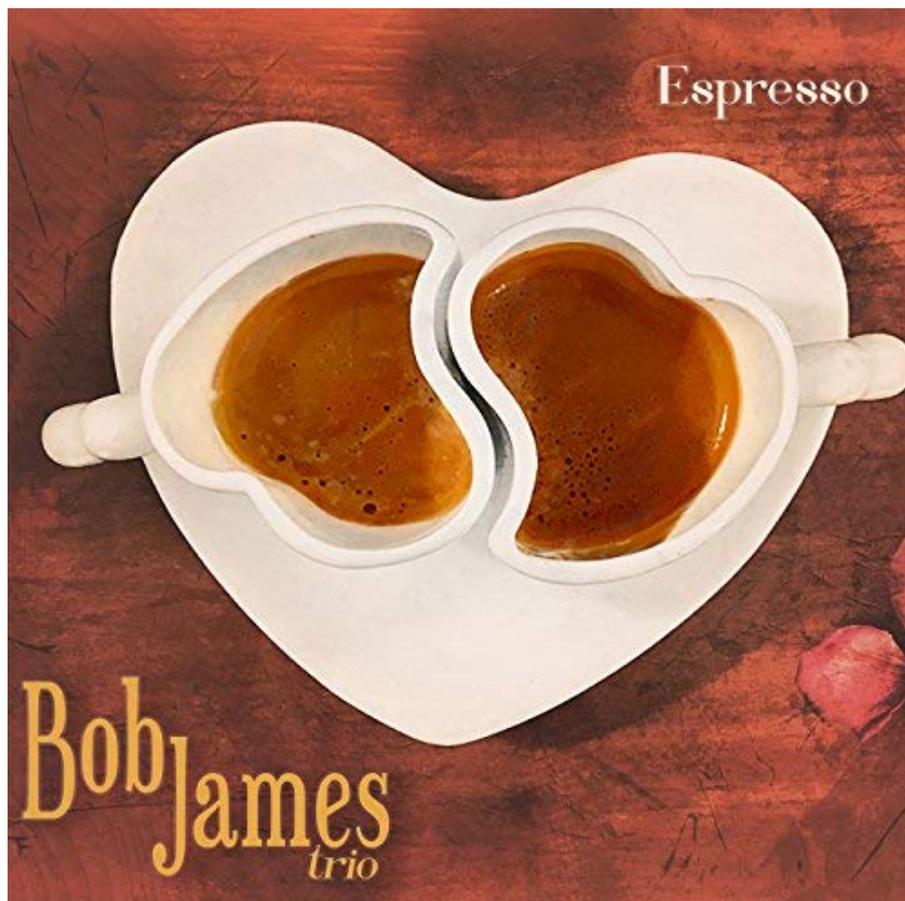


THE BOB JAMES TRIO: Espresso (Revolution/Evosound)

Written by Bill B

Wednesday, 10 October 2018 13:28 - Last Updated Wednesday, 10 October 2018 13:35



In a long and garlanded career, keyboard doyen Bob James has worked across genres and in a variety of formats. For his latest album, the 11 track 'Espresso', the 78 year old James returns to the format he began his career with – the classic jazz trio... piano, drums and bass. Specifically, here the drummer is veteran Washington DC sticks man, Billy Kilson while bass duties are handled by the more youthful Michael Palazzolo.

The track grabbing the attention at the moment seems to be 'Submarine'. The attention comes from the fact that this "sub" is a re-working of one of Bob's most famous tunes, 'Nautilus'. That one first appeared on the 1974 album 'One' and over the years it's been sampled dozens of times –notably by a varied crew of hip-hop pioneers. (Our statistician, by the way, tells us that Bob James is the 14th most sampled musician of all time!) . So here Bob simply samples himself – safe in the knowledge that he won't need to pay royalties to a third party!

There's a second cut here on which Mr J revisits his past.... a new version of William Salter and Ralph McDonald's 'Mr Magic'. The tune, of course, is most famously associated with Grover Washington Jr but (and, as Michael Caine might say) not a lot of people know this Bob James was the arranger and MD for the Washington original. So he feels fully justified putting

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his spin on it here whilst also allowing drummer Kilson to show his dexterity.

For James, there's more nostalgia on the album's other cover... a version of Fats Waller's 'Ain't Misbehavin'. James tells us that the cut is homage to his wife who passed away 18 months ago. She was a big fan of 30s jazz.

'Topside' is another album highlight. Here the homage appears to be aimed at the classic 60s soul-jazz of the Ramsey Lewis Trio. 'Topside' (with a flavour of Bobby Hebb's 'Sunny') has all the verve live atmosphere and swing of those chart-topping Lewis live albums. Best of the ballads on 'Espresso' is the gentle 'One Afternoon'.

Oddly, maybe, there's no track called 'Espresso' on 'Espresso'. Maybe the music, like the short, sharp coffee, is meant to stimulate and fortify; the 11 tracker sure does.

(BB) 4/5