

Lou Marini

Stars Aligned

It took more than 20 years for saxophonist Lou Marini's new Blujazz CD, *Starmaker*, to see the light of day. Recorded in 1990 and named after a 1937 science fiction novel by Olaf Stapledon, the album features nine original tracks performed by some of Marini's best friends and associates. The album's release was sidetracked due to Marini's lack of success in finding a proper label for it, not to mention some personal-life distractions that prevented him from pursuing it further. More than two decades later, a bit of serendipity led to his renewed interest in the long-shelved but never-abandoned project, which was engineered by world-class producer Jay Messina.

"About a year-and-a-half ago, I saw Jay on a recording date, and he said, 'Where are you storing that, and have you transferred it to digital yet?'" Marini recalled while in Chicago this summer during a tour with James Taylor's band. "He said, 'Man, you've got to transfer that or you could lose it.' When I finally heard it digitally, it sounded so great. Jay said I was crazy not to put this out." Blujazz released the CD this summer, effectively transporting listeners, and Marini, simultaneously back in time and firmly into the present.

In his long career as a saxophonist and woodwind doubler, Marini, 67, is known for creating accessible music that's deeply rooted in his straight-ahead jazz background. He has been in high demand as a performer and clinician since graduating from North Texas State University, where he was in the One O'Clock Lab Band—though he claims he didn't even realize he had a career until he was in his 40s.

An ace soloist, expert arranger and valued member of numerous ensembles over the decades, he has worked with top artists across multiple genres—from Woody Herman, Lew Soloff and Frank Zappa to Blood, Sweat & Tears, the "Saturday Night Live" Band, the Blues Brothers Band and a long list of high-profile pop, rock and r&b artists. He's even served as musical director of the Brianza Blues Festival in Monza, Italy, and gigs frequently in a band led by actress and singer Linda Carter (of TV's "Wonder Woman" fame). Thanks to his professionalism, his laid-back personal style and his ability to flat-out wail in any musical situation, everybody loves "Blue Lou" (a nickname bestowed upon him by comedic actor and blues aficionado Dan Akroyd).

Starmaker features the trumpet playing of Alan Rubin, a.k.a. "Mr. Fabulous," a friend of Marini's who passed away last year. "I had asked Alan to be in the booth as sort of my co-



BY ANDREW LEFLEY

producer on the session," Marini said. "We were talking with Jay about something technical, and suddenly Alan says, 'Hey, check out what they're playing.' The guys had gotten into creating this beautiful soundscape. So that's the way the album starts off, and it ends in a similar way. That's one thing I like about this CD: There's so much free playing from everybody."

The CD contains funk, blues, jazz and ambient elements, with plenty of live-in-the-studio group interplay. It even features a couple of vocal performances from Marini. "I'm singing a lot better now," Marini said, noting that he's come a long way as a vocalist since recording *Starmaker*. "The reason is, my wife is Spanish, and I know a lot of musicians there. For the past three years I've been doing a lot of work with a Spanish blues quartet called Red House. When I go and visit my wife's family in Madrid, we've been working, and I'm singing five or six of my tunes with them. It's a different kind of singing than what's on the CD."

When it comes to playing his horns, Marini is all about articulating complete ideas and expressing them in a clear manner. "If I'm just playing the melody, I want to play the melody so that it feels like it's the first time you play it," said Marini, whose long gray hair stands in striking contrast to the never-gonna-grow-up twinkle in his eyes. "Even if you get into something that's very abstract, I want to have that abstract playing come from a clear feeling."

Marini, who grew up as the son of a band director in Navarre, Ohio, has always been good at maintaining a high level of energy onstage. "I've had a lot of fun, and I've spent my life with great musicians since the time I was a kid," he said. "I admire the guys who are still burning just the way they were when they were kids. In a lot of ways I burn harder now because I know that I'm on the tail end of that. Every time you play, you've got to remind yourself: Who knows how many more chances you're gonna get?"

—Ed Enright