

THE SONS OF BRASIL

"While You Were Out," The Sons of Brasil While You Were Out

Standing Bear Records

By Tom Ineck

With a reputation so firmly established in the world of Latin jazz and, in particular, those subgenres of Brazilian samba, bossa nova and choro, it comes as a great surprise that The Sons of Brazil had, until recently, only one recording in 17 years. To the band's enthusiastic fan base, which extends well beyond its Kansas City, Mo., home, the arrival of "While You Were Out" is long overdue.

The Berman Music Foundation has followed the evolution of The Sons and its featured players with much interest, featuring the ensemble as part of the local Jazz in June series in 2002 and 2007 and catching them whenever possible on their home turf.

For their latest outing, trumpeter Stan Kessler has once again assembled some of KC's finest musicians, including guitarist Danny Embrey, pianist Roger Wilder, bassist Greg Whitfield, drummer Doug Auwarter and percussions Gary Helm. On two tracks, Luiz Orsano is added on percussion.

It is refreshing that most of the 13 tunes were written by band members, with only two covers by Brazilian master Antonio Carlos Jobim, one by Joao Bosco and one by Jose Roberto Bertrami. Kessler's warm and breezy flugelhorn set the mood for his set-opening tune, "Joao." Embrey and Wilder expand on that mood with gently swinging solos.

Whitfield establishes the funky, fusion underpinnings of Bertrami's "Partido Alto," inspiring Wilder to a Herbie Hancock-style foray on the electric keyboard, and Kessler's playing is reminiscent of the late, great Freddie Hubbard in his bright, spirited solo. Embrey contributed three tunes, including the melodic masterpiece "Journey," which gives the guitarist an opportunity to explore imaginative changes with his deft fretwork.

Kessler gives the Jobim classic "Desafinado" a respectful arrangement that emphasizes his luxurious flugelhorn tone against Wilder's piano harmonies and a brief, but brilliant Embrey solo. With Kessler's "Salvador," the band returns to a pumping, rhythmic feel, featuring the composer's soaring trumpet and Orsano adding another layer of polyrhythmic percussion.

"Bala Com Bala," by Bosco, has a clever circular pattern that gives the piece an infectious forward motion and keeps the musicians and the listener enthralled. Kessler's playing is simply virtuosic in its confidence and execution. "Migration" is a gentle Embrey composition with some intriguingly melancholy "blue" chords that resolve upward, finally creating a more affirmative mood. The title track, a collaboration between Whitfield and Kessler, churns with a driving bass line, some two-fisted playing by Wilder and some high-note pyrotechnics by Kessler, capped by a percussion tour de force.

Jobim's "Surfboard" does seem to ride the crest of a wave. You can almost feel the ocean spray in its leaping chord structure and the lilting performances by all. "I've Got Samba" is Kessler's rambunctious tribute to the genre that popularized the dance-friendly music of Brazil for millions of Americans. Embrey's romantic ballad "Tell Me Now" is exquisitely beautiful, and it gets the perfect backing with Kessler's sensitive flugelhorn and Wilder's understated piano anchoring the guitarist's melodic treatment. Wilder contributed the gently swaying and curiously titled "Esso Bees." The set ends with Kessler's strutting, bluesy "If It Feels Good."

Perhaps as a nod to their loyal fans in Lincoln, most of the photos included in the CD liner are from that memorable Jazz in June concert of 2007, shot by BMF photographer Rich Hoover. "While You Were Out" is definitely IN, in the coolest sense of the word.