

What the critics are saying about Dave Holland

The commander-in-chief of a first rate, cutting edge group has to be everything: creative genius and effective entrepreneur, power player and diplomat, steeped in experience but fresh and unjaded. Few current leaders exemplify the role as well as bassist Dave Holland.

"Dave fulfills my definition of an artist." Antonio Hart

Howard Mandel, *Downbeat*

One of the most versatile bassists in jazz.

Howard Reich, *L.A. Times*

When Dave Holland walks on-stage, he gets reception unlike that of any other jazz star. It's an encouraging sign for jazz, because Holland is neither flashy nor young, like the rock stars who get such hoots, howls, whistles, and shouts of "yeah!" Rather, Holland is a master bassist and bandleader, one of the most sophisticated composers and arrangers in the jazz world.

Steve Greenlee, *Boston Globe*

Holland is one of jazz's great O-positive musicians – he can play with anyone. For the last two decades he's led his own superb small groups, but now he's put together a big band for an album, *What Goes Around* (ECM). The expanded palette has given his music antiphonal heft in addition to color.

Jon Garelick, *The Boston Phoenix*

There is no musician in jazz more widely respected

Andrew Gilbert, *Valley Times*

Dave Holland Quintet

One of the very best working bands in jazz.

Ben Ratliff, *New York Times*

One of the jewels of the jazz world.

Ben Ratliff, *The New York Times*

If there is any such thing as a jazz group that is currently "the greatest," it's the Dave Holland Quintet.

James Isaacs, *Boston Magazine*

[Not For Nothin'] Tight, full jazz from the finest bandleader of our time.

Steve Greenlee, *Boston Sunday Globe*

The quintet he assembled five years ago is consistently held up as the best working band in jazz, and jazz writers and aficionados have grown accustomed to calling Holland the finest bandleader of our time.

Steve Greenlee, *The Boston Globe*

In four years, bassist Dave Holland's quintet has grown into perhaps the finest working band in jazz. ...an outfit working at its peak.

Ed Hazell, *Boston Phoenix*

This is music that's intricate and often exotic, but never less than accessible – it's too gorgeous to be anything less. ****

Glenn Whipp, *L.A. Times*

The Dave Holland Quintet has been acknowledged as one of the most polished and creative in acoustic jazz.

Howard Reich, *L.A. Times*

The Dave Holland Quintet could be considered a mathematician's quandary because, in its case, the whole is greater than the sum of its formidable parts.

Ken Franckling, *UPI Arts & Entertainment*

The preeminent regular working band in jazz today is the Dave Holland Quintet. The gravitational force of the group gestalt is so strong that brilliant individual enterprise is contained within the whole.

Not for Nothin' is a project of such self-evident excellence that one distrusts even one's minimal reservations. This music exemplifies technical virtuosity, intellectual rigor, and pleasure in the playing.

Thomas Conrad, *Stereophile*

The answer is: Holland on bass, Chris Potter on reeds, Robin Eubanks on trombone, Steve Nelson on vibes and Billy Kilson on drums. The correct question: Who makes up the best jazz combo on Earth?

Gene Seymour, *Newsday (Nassau Edition)*

Welcome to the state of the art.

Again, Holland displays the rare knack for integrating the personalities of his side-men into an overall musical vision.

Martin Wisckol, *The Orange County Register*

The exploratory post-bop quintet led by bassist Dave Holland has long been regarded as state of the art.

Mark Stryker, *Detroit Free Press*

The most acclaimed small ensemble in jazz today (the Dave Holland Quintet)

Minneapolis City Pages

Dave Holland Big Band *What Goes Around*

Mr. Holland's first album with this group is imaginative, swinging, to-the-point.

Ben Ratliff, *The New York Times*

Holland is dogged about putting the groove up front and center.

Mr. Holland's usual five-man group is one of the strongest in mainstream jazz.

What resulted was the kind of positive tension a bandleader can achieve only by having first-rate musicians, letting them play at peak capacity and then shaping that mass of sound. Let's hear more of this band soon.

Ben Ratliff, *The New York Times*

Don't miss the album *What Goes Around* (ECM), one of the year's surprising triumphs.

Gary Giddins, *The Village Voice*

The wonder of Holland's 13-piece band, as recently heard at Birdland and on his momentous new album, *What Goes Around* (ECM) is that the pieces don't sound reworked, even when you compare them with his small-band or solo bass versions. Constantly in demand for his gorgeous sound, upbeat swing, and sturdily inventive and melodic accompaniment, Holland managed to hold together a series of quintets.

Astonishing

This[The Big Band] looks like the start of something big.

Gary Giddins, *Village Voice*

Holland's musicality has been at the heart of several of the most important groups in jazz history.

If you are already aware of Holland's diverse body of work, the admiration comes as no surprise. If not, *What Goes Around* makes a superb entry point.

Holland's bluesy solo prelude on "Shadow Dance" ably exhibits the qualities that make him one of the preeminent upright bassists of all time: melodic invention, flawless time and beautiful tone.

Jonathan Herrera, *Bass Player*

A tour de force of big-band writing.

Howard Reich, *L.A. Times*

The performance [UCLA] was a state-of-the-art example of contemporary jazz artistry.

Don Heckman, *L.A. Times*

Holland and company listened, intuited, and conversed with a zest that sparked the entire set. The uplifting performance was particularly momentous – for the musicians as well as for the audience – because it occurred last year just ten days after the September 11th terrorist attacks.

Big-band music at its best.

Dan Ouellette, *Strings*

Holland's latest album, his first featuring a 13-man big band, is a delight.

FK, *The Absolute Sound*

There are three things essential to a good large group release. The first are good musicians capable of ensemble playing and personal solo segments. The second is strong compositions. The third is an able leader who can both direct a session and be magnanimous enough to stand back from it. All three things are thoroughly satisfied on *What Goes Around*.

Dave Holland keeps up his reputation as one of the finest bassists of the past 40 years and a bandleader to emulate.

Andrey Henkin, *All About Jazz*

What Goes Around is – no surprise here – beautiful and challenging. It's also revelatory.

Steve Greenlee, *The Boston Globe*

One of the best jazz shows of the year. [Berklee Performance Center]

Steve Greenlee, *Boston Globe*

The 13-piece band has a lyrical new album on the shelf, *What Goes Around*, a work bristling with both spontaneous interplay and lush layers.

Martin Wisckol, *Orange County Register*



Dave Holland Quintet – a brilliant band soars

By Howard Reich

Published June 11, 2010

It's difficult to recall the last time a band received a standing ovation at the Jazz Showcase, a tough room that sets exalted standards for those who take its stage.

But the crowd shot to its feet on Wednesday night, after the Dave Holland Quintet finished the first set of a weeklong engagement. There simply was no arguing that one of the most dynamic small units in jazz had performed near the top of its considerable form.

Certainly listeners would have been even more delighted if Holland had brought his octet, which plays robustly on Holland's latest CD, "Pathways" (Dare2 Records). But the quintet at the core of that recording has been Holland's primary expressive outlet for years, and he has honed it into an organization without peer.

Just listen to these five musicians working together, Steve Nelson's buoyant phrases on vibraphone powered by Nate Smith's incendiary drum work and Holland's tonally resplendent bass lines. Somehow, these three musicians know how to share a rhythmic pulse without getting locked into predictable patterns. The elasticity of their approach to beats and offbeats cannot be taught or mimicked – it's uniquely theirs, developed through years of performance and several enlightening recordings.

Then there's the front line, Robin Eubanks' full-and-rounded tone on trombone facing off – or partnering – with Chris Potter's slightly acidic, slightly abrasive sound on tenor saxophone. When blasting against each other, the musicians produce palpable sonic tension. When working in tandem, they suggest four horns rather than two.

Remarkably, though, the combined force of these five musicians owes not to volume but to musical incident. Rather than bray for all they're worth, in other words, the players craft multiple melodic lines, these strands interwoven in often delicate and intricate ways. En masse, this band never plays at maximum decibel levels, focusing instead on the luster of its sound and the flow of its ideas.

The Holland Quintet opened its engagement with a tour de force, an extended version of the title track to "Pathways." Immediately, each of the players announced his intentions, Potter's heroic tenor solo enriched by Smith's sharp-edged percussive attacks, Holland's insistent bass lines, Eubanks' declamatory trombone shouts and Nelson's sonorous chords on vibes. It's not easy to sustain this much energy without playing too fast or loud, but the Holland Quintet somehow did it.

The Boston Globe

No matter what the time, a signature bassist

By: Steve Greenlee
Published: April 19, 2010

You've got to admire bassist Dave Holland. The guy has been at the forefront of jazz for more than 40 years — from providing the brooding thump on Miles Davis's landmark "In a Silent Way" to pressing one of avant-garde jazz's finest recordings, "Conference of the Birds," to leading the most consistently impressive bands of the past 20 years.

Yet he doesn't seem to have an ounce of ego about him. Friday night at the Regattabar, he chewed the fat with people in the audience before his set. Onstage he introduced each song and took the solo spotlight only briefly. Even after all these years, he seems truly humbled by all the applause.

He sure deserved it. The quintet — which included vibraphonist Steve Nelson, tenor saxophonist Chris Potter, trombonist Robin Eubanks, and drummer Nate Smith — stretched out on five long songs with deceptively complicated frameworks. It's almost as though these guys don't know how to play in 4/4; they'd rather challenge themselves by making odd time signatures seem completely normal.

Holland is on the road to support his new album, "Pathways," which features his octet. The quintet may have been three horns short, but they weren't needed. The band began with the title tune, Nelson's chiming, four-mallet attack segueing to a long, long sax solo that had Potter weaving in and out of the melodic line. When Holland soloed, he plucked contrapuntally and counter-rhythmically at the same time, and then kicked into double time.

It only grew more hectic. "How's Never?," with its 7/8 meter, became a feature for Eubanks, who blew with powerful precision until Smith and Holland squared off in the most simpatico bass-and-drums duet you're ever going to hear. This quintet went wild even when it played a ballad. Trombone, saxophone, and vibraphone coalesced into a meaty front line on "Souls Harbor" until Eubanks jumped out front and played both against and behind the beat.

The sax-bass-drums conversation in the middle of "Full Circle" grew so maniacally funky (in 6/4) that the guy at the next table forgot he had a cellphone pressed to his ear; he allowed it to slide down to his chin, where it remained for the rest of the song. Hey, with such great music being created, the person on the other end of the line surely didn't mind being forgotten.

Dave Holland Octet: *Pathways*

By: John Kelman

Published: March 16, 2010

It's been nearly four years since bassist Dave Holland has delivered an album based around his enduring quintet of over a decade. Since 2006's *Critical Mass* (Dare2), he's released *Pass It On* (Dare2, 2008) and *The Monterey Quartet: Live at the 2007 Monterey Jazz Festival* (Monterey Jazz Festival Records, 2009), both featuring ensembles where, for the first time in his lengthy career, the bassist collaborated with pianists. While both discs were as exhilarating and groove-heavy as anything he's done, the inherent chemistry of his quintet—powerhouse saxophonist Chris Potter, ever-inventive trombonist Robin Eubanks, harmonically modernistic vibraphonist Steve Nelson and potent drummer Nate Smith—remains something special, whether on its own or at the core of Holland's big band, last heard on *Overtime* (Dare2, 2005).

As a happy medium between the smaller, lither quintet and its more expansive big band cousin, the Dave Holland Octet has toured occasionally over the past several years, making a formal release long overdue. Recorded live at New York's Birdland at the beginning of 2009, *Pathways* also bucks Holland's recent trend with a set list culled largely from the past, but with updated arrangements that take advantage of both the ensemble firepower and solo acumen of additional members Antonio Hart (alto saxophone), Alex Sipiagin (trumpet) and Gary Smulyan (baritone sax)—all members of the Dave Holland Big Band and a larger musical family to which the veteran bassist has been consistently loyal over the past decade.

While the modal "Shadow Dance" has been a part of Holland's repertoire since *Jumpin' In* (ECM, 1984), with the bassist's chordless, horn-driven quintet of the 1980s, it has never grooved quite this hard, thanks to Smith's ability to be simultaneously frenetic *and* in the pocket. Nelson's marimba adds a new dimension to a familiar track that features a lengthy, painstakingly built and ultimately climactic solo from Hart that ratchets up even higher when Holland, Smith and Nelson kick into high gear. Nelson has played "Ebb and Flo" before, on the 1996 ECM quartet date, *Dream of the Elders*, but with four horns to push the melody and provide egging-on support for its soloists—Eubanks, Holland and Potter's particularly incendiary tenor spot—Holland's new, Latin-esque arrangement burns even brighter.

Holland's larger ensemble arrangement of the riff-driven "How's Never?"—originally heard in the guitar-centric context of his egalitarian Gateway trio with John Abercrombie and drummer Jack DeJohnette—is intriguing. Even more so is "Blue Jean," originally a Latin ballad on his *World Trio* (Intuition, 1995) date with acoustic guitarist (and Robin's brother) Kevin Eubanks and percussionist Mino Cinelu. Here, in a significantly extended version, it is still a minor-keyed blues ballad, but Holland's lush, Gil Evans-like horn arrangement creates an expansive context

for a Potter's soulful tenor solo, as he liberally quotes the classic "The Shadow of Your Smile" before passing the baton to Sipiagin, whose flugelhorn solo is a combination of serpentine virtuosity and deeply rooted lyricism.

Despite a preponderance of older material, also including Sipiagin's knotty, Brazilian-tinged "Wind Dance"—first heard on the trumpeter's *Out of the Circle* (ArtistShare, 2007) and, like the original, with vibrant solos from both Sipiagin and Eubanks—there's new material, too. The set opens with Holland's 11-minute title track, another Afro-Cuban, modal workout that gives Smulyan an early chance to shine with a solo that swings hard as it weaves new melodies through Holland's slowly unfolding changes. A lithe yet muscular bass solo leads to a tarter turn for Sipiagin (this time on trumpet) which, as it evolves, reaches into the stratosphere without ever turning brash or harsh. Potter turns to soprano on his own "Sea of Marmara," a gentle, atmospheric track made all the more ethereal by Nelson's shimmering vibes and an early segment where lines are passed around the horns like a tag team, but which, like most tracks on *Pathways*, turns high octane once the solos begin.

That Holland can find so many ways to exploit the inherent chemistry of his quintet without ever losing steam is, perhaps, one of his most remarkable achievements in a career now in its fifth decade. The octet, like the Dave Holland Big Band, has plenty more color at its disposal, yet never seems to restrict the freedom of its soloists, even as Holland uses the full ensemble for far more than just merely setting up heads that wrap around solo sections. The arrangements are far more imaginative and complex than any by-rote process, yet breathe naturally and accessibly. It's this highly compelling combination that—along with outstanding source material (old and new) and eight uncompromisingly inventive players (all leaders in their own right)—makes *Pathways* a very welcome addition to Holland's growing discography.

Tracks: Pathways; How's Never?; Sea of Marmara; Ebb and Flow; Blue Jean; Wind Dance; Shadow Dance.

Personnel: Dave Holland: bass; Chris Potter: tenor and soprano saxophones; Robin Eubanks: trombone; Steve Nelson: vibraphone, marimba; Nate Smith: drums; Antonio Hart: alto saxophone, flute; Alex Sipiagin: trumpet, flugelhorn; Gary Smulyan: baritone saxophone.

Dave Holland Quintet at Birdland, April 20, 2010

By: David Miller

Published: May 3, 2010

Dave Holland Quintet
Birdland
New York, NY
April 20, 2010

The Dave Holland Quintet (DHQ) is one of those rarest of things in jazz—a working group. These days, due to a number of factors (cough\$\$cough), jazz musicians are spread very thin in terms of the number of projects they participate in. They jump fluidly from project to project, sideman gig to leader, studio to club. Frequently they don't even have time to rehearse before a gig with musicians whom they've never played with before. Luckily, there is a standard jazz "language," and these musicians are consummate professionals, so there is always a common ground to be found. However, it's rare to find a band that explores its own chemistry as deeply as, say, Miles' second quintet.

The Dave Holland Quintet has reached that level. Listening to the DHQ, together now for the better part of a decade, the difference compared to other groups is palpable. For one, the well of tunes that they can choose from each night is almost limitless given that everyone in the band is a serious composer in his own right. Each musician knows his bandmates' tendencies and keeps perfect pace. The best way to describe it is that this band knows each other's ins and outs so well that they can concentrate fully on the exploration of the music without worrying about the musicians playing it.

And the musicians themselves are at the top of their respective games. Holland's tone is remarkable, and the only other bassist I know of who can sing through his instrument like Holland can is Christian McBride (not coincidentally the Christian McBride Band, recently on hiatus, is also one of the best working bands in the business). Nate Smith is the perfect foil for Holland on drums—his sense of rhythm keeps even the most knotty of Holland's compositions danceable. On this night Smith drove the danceability even to the point of outright funk on "Lucky Seven" with its entrancing bottom riff.

Smith is saxophonist Chris Potter's partner in crime in yet another working band, Potter's Underground, a dirty funk ensemble with a jazz sensibility (read my review of their latest, *Ultrahang* (2009, ArtistShare), here). In the DHQ, Potter reigns in his funk tendencies in favor of muscular yet melodic blowing that can be alternately beautiful and haunting. His loong solo on

"The Eyes Have It," the first tune of the set, never once stepped outside the changes, while his composition "Soul's Harbor" was played passionately by the entire ensemble, living up to its ominous title.

Trombonist Robin Eubanks is remarkable—very few artists can bring that instrument to the frontline as prominently as Eubanks can. His solos, as always, were consistently inventive and exploratory. He was featured most often in this set, taking extended solos on "Soul's Harbor" and "Lucky Seven."

Vibraphonist Steve Nelson was content to lurk in the shadows, only taking a single solo turn, but was nevertheless omnipresent, especially in his silence. Holland has almost never worked with a pianist, preferring to walk the road less traveled with vibes or guitar (the sole recent exception being his sextet's *Pass It On* (2008, Emarcy)). And Nelson is unique in his brand of support, using quick, sharp accents to provide counterpoint to the soloist.

The trademark of the DHQ is its extended codas, with both Potter and Eubanks improvising over an extraordinarily muscular rhythm section. The listener can be swept away by the music and taken on a turbulent ride up over mountain peaks and down to the depths of the valley. These exceptional moments of musical communication were frequent on this night, and in fact the entire set was quite loose. Maybe it was the laid-back, smoky atmosphere at Birdland, or the crowd of cognoscenti that you would expect late on a Tuesday night, or maybe the significance of the date, but the band seemed to be in the mood to explore. And explore they did, to the contentment of all involved.

<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=36351>

Dave Holland Octet: Pathways

By: George Varga

Dave Holland, much like bass giant, composer and bandleader Charles Mingus before him, thinks and listens as intently as he plays. By doing so, this British-born, New York-based luminary creates maximum emotional impact and meaning with every carefully considered note he produces. In at least one instance on *Pathways*, the Mingus influence is literal as well as conceptual. Witness the sly manner in which the mid-section of the earthy yet eloquent bass solo on “How’s Never” alludes to Mingus’ gospel-fueled opening lines on 1959’s “Better Git It in Your Soul.”

A master of concision, cohesion and propulsion—three qualities very much in evidence throughout *Pathways*—Holland also evokes the “social music” spirit of Miles Davis, in whose band he was featured between 1968 and 1970. His tenure included such landmark albums as *In a Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew*, as well as a performance with Davis at England’s historic 1970 Isle of Wight Festival.

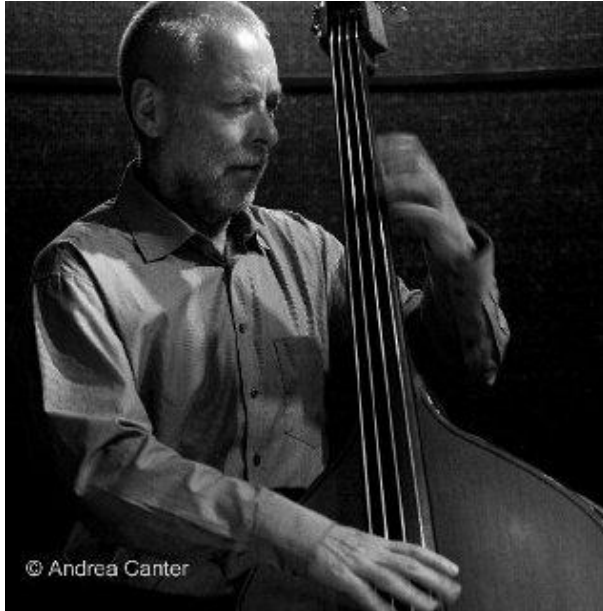
Truly a musician for all seasons, Holland, 63, has worked with Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins, Anthony Braxton, Bonnie Raitt, Carlos Santana, Cassandra Wilson, Tunisian oud master Anouar Brahem, Pat Metheny and many more. He also has two solo bass albums to his credit (1977’s exquisite *Emerald Tears* and 1993’s similarly stunning *Ones All*), along with a solo cello album (1982’s *Life Cycle*). *Pathways* is his second album of the past decade to be recorded at New York’s Birdland nightclub. It is his first ever with his octet, which he deftly co-anchors with drum dynamo Nate Smith and Steve Nelson on vibes and marimba. They are joined by fellow Holland-band veterans Chris Potter on tenor and soprano saxes and Robin Eubanks on trombone. This core ensemble is seamlessly augmented by baritone saxophonist Gary Smulyan, Russian-born trumpeter/flugelhorn player Alex Sipiagin and alto saxophonist/flutist Antonio Hart (who regularly subs for Potter in Holland’s quintet). Together, these eight musicians combine the flexibility and tonal and textural range of a polished big band with the intimacy and in-the-moment daring of a seemingly telepathic small group.

This is readily apparent beginning with the first selection, *Pathways*’ buoyant title track. It boasts a bravura baritone solo by Smulyan, a darting trumpet foray by Sipiagin and the first of several showcases for Holland, whose consistently solid yet fluid bass work is a marvel of sensitivity and frills-free invention. Even before the album climaxes with “Shadow Dance,” a 15-minute opus that finds Hart and Potter engaging in a galvanizing dual-sax dialogue following Smith’s expertly modulated drum solo, it is clear this is an exemplary performance by one of jazz’s most accomplished outfits. Fresh and vital, the octet sounds crisp and uncluttered even in its most animated moments. The brassy, strutting “Ebb and Flow” suggests what might happen if the city of New Orleans was temporarily relocated to Brazil, while the sumptuous ballad “Blue Jean” offers an ingenious marimba solo by the always arresting Nelson.

As Holland has done in virtually every one of his previous bands, he provides a platform for his *Pathways* colleagues to realize an individual and collective sense of purpose and cooperation. The resulting spirit of generosity, of selflessly yet emphatically serving each composition, pays off from start to finish on the seven-song album (five penned by Holland), which clocks in at over 75 minutes but doesn't contain a single extraneous note or gesture. Miles and Mingus would be proud.



The Dave Holland Quintet—Genius At Work
By Marrio Carrington
Published 6/03/10



The first show of a two night engagement by the Dave Holland Quintet at the Dakota in downtown Minneapolis on June 1st was exceptional -- and an invitation to return for another dose the next night. The Quintet is composed of Dave Holland on bass, Steve Nelson on vibes, Robin Eubanks on trombone, Chris Potter on sax and Nate Smith on drums. There is no need to go any further in search of excellence, as it is on full display with this extraordinary band that has been together for 13 years.

In Holland's native United Kingdom, there is the awe inspiring Stonehenge. How did the boulders get there? Who put them in that formation? Are they all that remain from the river that may have flowed through there thousands of years ago? Is it a former landing area for aliens? After walking around awhile you just come to accept Stonehenge as one of the wonders of the world. Just like the Dave Holland Quintet.

This sublime band of Holland's is unquestionably the most wondrous quintet currently performing in jazz and their virtuosity is nonpareil. The musicality of their individual improvisations-- which were impressive-- was surpassed by their collective simultaneous improvisations that defined harmonic rapture. Compositions were played from several albums and genius was in display all evening. Two of the songs written by Holland were worth the price

of admission by themselves—“How’s Never?” from his latest (octet) release, *Pathways*, and “Prime Directive” from the album of the same name.

The band members were having fun on stage as they were enjoying each others’ performances (smiles of appreciation, nods of acknowledgment, wide-eyed amazement) as much as the audience. Potter is sensational, Nelson is ethereal, Eubanks is fantastic and Smith is fabulous. The manner in which Holland orchestrates his band is ultra cool and you could easily imagine him playing the part of the most interesting man in the world in those Dos Equis beer commercials—“stay musical, my friends.”

I’m not sure what the criteria is for being knighted in England but Holland surely must be given serious consideration. If the standards include significant contributions in your field, give him a check for having played in the bands of Miles Davis as he entered his epochal electric phase (see “In A Silent Way,” “Bitches Brew”). If it’s versatility, give Holland a check mark for being able to contribute mightily as a sideman or leader in a trio, quartet, quintet, sextet, septet, octet and big band format in his career thus far. If it’s for achieving master status in your chosen profession, continuing to evolve and bringing joy to countless fans around the world for a sustained period of time, give him another check. Sir Dave Holland fits, and if a write-in effort is needed, let’s start a Betty White-style Facebook campaign.



Dave Holland Octet: Pathways

By: Thomas R. Erdmann

Year: 2010

Record Label: Dare2 Records

Style: Straight-Ahead / Classic

Musicians: Dave Holland (bass), Antonio Hart (alto sax and flute), Chris Potter (tenor and soprano sax), Gary Smulyan (baritone sax), Alex Sipiagin (trumpet and flugelhorn), Robin Eubanks (trombone), Steve Nelson (vibraphone and marimba), Nate Smith (drums)

Review:

Bassist Dave Holland is, by any thought process applicable, a true jazz master. Formerly with Miles Davis, Holland also co-founded the influential free jazz band Circle, co-formed Gateway, and worked with others like Sam Rivers, Stan Getz and Thelonious Monk. Since those early days Holland has mostly worked as a band leader, forming a variety of always interesting groups based on slight variations in timbre brought about as much by Holland's writing as the artists who he chose to include. Of particular note is his Grammy winning big band, which demonstrated the depth of Holland's harmonic palette and contrapuntal proclivities.

Holland's current venture, chronicled here from a live date at Birdland in 2009, unites members of his working quintet with those from the big band into an octet. Even more so than Chick Corea's Origin, Holland has taken the best and most deserving jazz minds and talents who lack only wider recognition, not to mention the most underappreciated jazz musicians working today, and codifies them into a single tightly wrapped amalgam that is fleet of foot, quick of mind and exciting as "all-get-out."

The band includes baritone saxophonist and New York stalwart Gary Smulyan, who rocks the house from beginning to end. His solo on "Pathways" is, typical for him, full of quick turns of harmonic alteration, solidly grounded in jazz's tradition yet still exciting and original in conception. Alto saxophonist Antonio Hart is soulful even as he inserts twists and turns into the vamp-based chordal pattern on "How's Never?" before letting it all out and tearing up the joint. Drummer Nate Smith is not just a capable soloist but also able to deftly handle the ruminations and kicks necessary to drive music as rhythmically difficult and intricate as this to powerful climaxes over and over. Chris Potter, more known for his tenor work, demonstrates that all of his subtly oriented upper chordal structure abilities are just as resplendent on soprano on the beautiful ballad "Sea Of Mamara." It's trombonist Steve Davis, however, who impresses the most. The degree to which he has grown with regard to tonal shadings, technical prowess and depth of thought, from when he first started playing with Holland, is outstanding, and his solo on "Ebb and Flow" is nothing if not deserving of its own Grammy.

Holland is ever the rock and spiritual guru from which the ensemble derives its drive. His opening solo on "How's Never?" lays out the not just the harmonic territory to be explored, but also the mixed meter backbeat groove upon which the chart is based. As a composer he is unique and his charts feature multi-leveled connections that allow for more interplay than even he creates in his thickly scored big band work. Into this mix he gives each soloist plenty of time to develop their ideas. All band leaders should be so generous.

There is never a time when this band isn't contrapuntally involved at many levels with mixed line radiances that never settle – they're too busy boiling over the pot. If this recording doesn't earn yet another Grammy for Holland there will be something wrong in Denmark.

<http://www.jazzreview.com/cd/review-20953.html>