

Folk Roots/Folk Branches with Mike Regenstreif

Reviews, commentaries, and radio playlists from veteran music journalist and broadcaster Mike Regenstreif.

Billy Novick -- Music from The Great Gatsby

BILLY NOVICK'S BLUE SYNCOPATORS

Music from The Great Gatsby

Billy Novick

billynovick.com

Clarinet and sax player **Billy Novick** has been one of my favourite musicians since I first heard him playing with **David Bromberg** in the mid-1970s. A few years later, I got to know him and to hear him a lot when the small booking agency I operated for several years in the late-'70s represented Billy's duo with master finger-style guitarist **Guy Van Duser**. Thirty years later, as evidenced on this CD, Billy is still making exceptional music.

Billy was commissioned by the Washington Ballet to provide the score for their production, earlier this year, of *The Great Gatsby*, a ballet based on the classic novel of the 1920s by **F. Scott Fitzgerald**. Not having seen the ballet, I can say, without reservation, that the CD stands on its own as a great set of 1920s-era jazz, blues and ragtime that includes a bunch of period classics and some great in-the-tradition pieces composed by Billy.

Billy's Boston-based band, the **Blue Syncopators**, are mostly playing in New Orleans Dixieland mode as they run through such numbers as **James P. Johnson's** "Charleston," **W.C. Handy's** "Yellow Dog Blues," **Scott Joplin's** "Swipsey Cakewalk" and **Louis Armstrong's** "Wild Man Blues." The interplay between the various horns and the impeccable rhythm section is a constant delight.

Also delightful is the work of vocalists **Louise Grasmere** and **Dane Vannater** on several numbers. Whether it's Grasmere's humorous scatting on Billy's "Dance of the Ashes" or sounding like a classic blues singer on "He May Be Your Man," or Vannater singing poignantly on Irving Berlin's "What'll I Do," or camping it up on "We Are All Going Calling on the Kaiser," their singing is in the same league as the instrumentalists.

--Mike Regenstreif