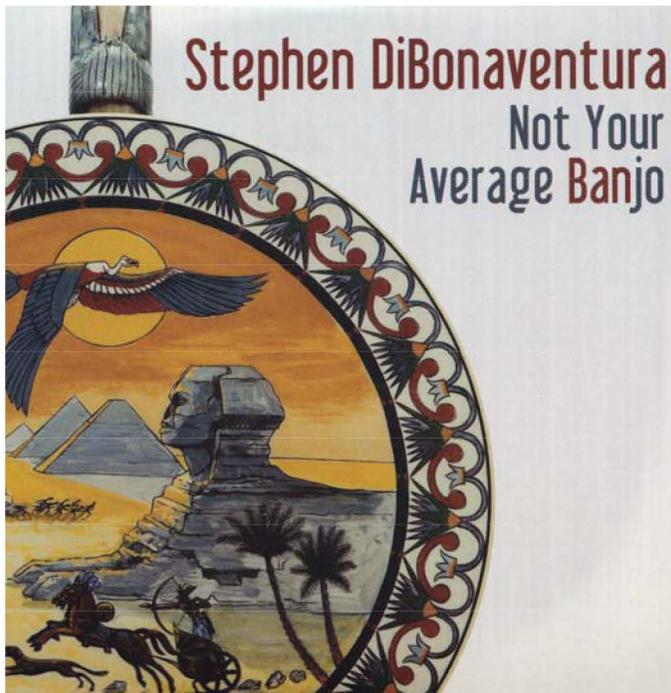


Stephen DiBonaventura

Not Your
Average Banjo



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Reviewed by Johnny Baier

For as long as I've known him, I have watched Stephen DiBonaventura take his tenor banjo playing along a path which is quite different than most. As a young player his technical ability, drive and perseverance were obvious. However while he was completely capable of following a more traditional banjo pathway, Stephen has always sought to create his own musical identity - and apply the same to his banjo playing. In recent years that direction has become well defined as we have all watch DiBonaventura mature into a passionate and technically marvellous practitioner of modern jazz on the tenor banjo. Studying primarily under jazz guitarists, Stephen has adapted much of the language and literature of modern jazz guitar to his tenor banjo. While this is admittedly an acquired taste to the more traditional tenor banjo template which is ingrained in many, the fact is that if the tenor banjo is ever to be accepted in a more mainstream modern day marketplace, it will likely be the result of recording projects such as this. As for project specifics, *Not Your Average Banjo* consists of two CDs containing 17 tracks. The repertoire includes several familiar jazz standards such as *Stella by Starlight* and *On*

Green Dolphin Street intermingled with more straight ahead jazz compositions by the likes of Chick Corea and Freddy Hubbard. The arrangements (by guitarist Steve Giordano) and musical settings are laid back, lush and modern and the technical production is excellent. Additionally, the extended length of virtually every track gives both DiBonaventura and Giordano plenty of room to stretch out and conduct their musical expression and conversation. As the nature of a project such as this prohibits an ongoing display of the pyrotechnic banjo skills which he possess, Stephen plays with great restraint and creativity - while giving the listener occasional glimpses of such expertise when appropriate. After years of passionate study and practice, with this project Stephen DiBonaventura has validated the tenor banjo as a serious instrument in the idiom of modern jazz. Definitely *not* your average banjo! Well done Stephen.