New Product: Brand X

Product. Brand X on Passport Records (PB 8690). Jazz-rock/fusion groups often take themselves too seriously, which ultimately leads to pretentiousness. Most of the artists on the prestigious ECM label present this serious "art" rather than accessible music. Brand X is a band that never allows pretense to obscure its writing or musicianship, as is evidenced by the new release. Product presents a set of innovative tunes performed by excellent musicians, almost an overabundance of talent. Talent is not all the band has to its credit; each member has had considerable experience as a session musician, or has performed in other groups. Brand X began in 1975 when drummer Phil Collins of Genesis formed an experimental jazz group. He recruited friends from sessions he had worked; in its original form Brand X released three albums. The fourth album, Masques, featured a new keyboard player (Peter Robinson) and a new drummer; but Product features Collins once again, plus returning keyboardist Robin Lumley. A second bassist, John Giblin (formerly of the pop group Metro), has also been added, as well as percussionist Mike Clarke (replacing the drummer from Masques).

All these cooks do not spoil the broth, since all eight of them never appear together on any tune. If you take the half hour necessary to decipher the credits, you realize that Clarke only plays on two tunes (he was probably a temporary replacement until Collins' return), and bassist Percy Jones plays on just three cuts (Jones is being replaced by Giblin). All but two of the members contribute to the songwriting effort, and it is to the songs that I now turn.

"Don't Make Waves" opens the album with a bouncy guitar riff topped with vocals (a first for the group) by Collins and Goodall. Goodall and Collins collaborate again on "Soho," the band's only concession to the funk rhythms preferred by most jazz-rockers. Lumley penned "Algon" (where an ordinary cup of broth, since all eight of them never appear together on any tune. If you take the half hour necessary to decipher the credits, you realize that Clarke only plays on two tunes (he was probably a temporary replacement until Collins' return), and bassist Percy Jones plays on just three cuts (Jones is being replaced by Giblin). All but two of the members contribute to the songwriting effort, and it is to the songs that I now turn.

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