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STEREO

MODERN JAZZ QUARTET

Fontessa - Pyramid

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The Modern Jazz Quartet (MJQ) was an influential music group established in 1952 and for most of their long career composed of John Lewis (piano, musical director), Milt Jackson (vibraphone), Percy Heath (double bass), and Connie Kay (drums).

Initially a side project for personnel from trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie's hard-swinging big band, the MJQ gradually became a full-time endeavor and one of the more prominent jazz bands of the post-WWII era. Under Lewis's leadership they carved their own niche by specializing in an elegant, restrained music (touching on bebop, cool jazz, third stream and classical music) that used sophisticated counterpoint yet nonetheless retained a strong blues feel. They introduced several jazz standards, including "Django" and "Bags' Groove".

Initially active into the 1970s until Jackson quit due to creative disagreement and frustration with their busy touring schedule, the MJQ reformed intermittently into the 1990s.

The enigma of the MJQ's music-making was that each individual member could improvise with an exciting vibrancy but in toto the group specialised in genteel baroque counterpoint. Their approach to jazz attracted promoters who sponsored "jazz packet" concerts during the 1950s. One show would consist of several contrasting groups. The MJQ were ideal participants because no other group sounded like them. They provided a visual contrast as well, formally attired in their customary tuxedos.

The group played blues as much as they did fugues, but the result was tantalising when one considered the hard-swinging potential of each individual player. Their best-selling record, *Django*, typified their neo-classical approach to polyphony.

Notes from Wikipedia

Producer's Note

The album *Fontessa* was the first the MJQ recorded for Atlantic records, and although normally heard in mono, it was in fact also recorded in stereo. However, as the occasional issue on vinyl and CD testifies, there were myriad technical flaws in the stereo issue, hence the current "official" preference for mono. This remastering aims to correct or reduce as much as possible those flaws and present the stereo *Fontessa* in as good a light as possible. This has required extensive restoration, removing heavy electrical hum, thumps, bumps, hiss and more. In addition, in order to bring some life to the rather dead sound of the stereo mix, I've used a convolution reverberation which recreates perfectly the live acoustic of Birdland in New York, where the MJQ doubtless played on numerous occasions. The coupling here, *Pyramid*, demonstrates what further improvements XR remastering can offer an already accomplished studio recording of the era. **Andrew Rose**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
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MODERN JAZZ QUARTET

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XR

Fontessa

Stereo, 1956

Pyramid

Stereo, 1959/60



STEREO STUDIO RECORDINGS, XR REMASTERED

THE MODERN JAZZ QUARTET

Fontessa

1. Versailles (*Porte de Versailles*) (3:27)
2. Angel Eyes (3:54)
3. Fontessa (11:17)
4. Over The Rainbow (3:57)
5. Bluesology (4:53)
6. Willow Weep for Me (4:53)
7. Woody 'n You (4:54)

Pyramid

8. Vendome (2:32)
9. Pyramid (Blues for Junior) (10:53)
10. It Don't Mean A Thing (5:04)
11. Django (4:37)
12. How High The Moon (6:18)
13. Romaine (7:25)

John Lewis *piano*
Milt Jackson *vibraphone*
Percy Heath *bass*
Connie Kay *drums*

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of **The Modern Jazz
Quartet**, taken c. 1964

Fontessa

Recorded 22 January & [5] 14 February,
1956, in New Jersey & [5] New York
N.B. Track 5 features a different take to
that used on the mono release
Producer: Nesuhi Ertegun
Originally issued as Atlantic SD 1231

Pyramid

Recorded August 22 & 25 and December
21, 1959 and January 15, 1960
Music Inn, Lenox, Massachusetts and
Capitol Studios, New York City
Producer: Nesuhi Ertegun
Originally issued as Atlantic 1325

Total duration: **74:04**

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