

When seasoned tenor master, Buck Hill approaches a composition, he cunningly utilizes the alluring transportive power of the melody to unveil its emotional center. In most cases, that center consists of the blues, that sensual omnipresent energy that provides the interlocking fabric for the African-American musical diaspora. In jazz, the persuasive vibe of the blues gives compositions a sense of earthiness that prevents them from being merely cerebral noodling. Even when composers are seemingly reaching for the stars (ie. George Russell, Ornette Coleman, Henry Threadgill), the blues always keeps the music in touch with the people. In certain cases, blues' centripetal force can be so majestic that it'll give a composition universal appeal. Hill's ability to harness blues' sacred ethos enables him to conjure a variety of moods ranging from the juke-joint romp of "Blues In The Closet," to the feverish ballad "How Do You Keep The Music Playing." Match that with his heightened awareness of melody, technical proficiency and control of his instrument, and undeniable sense of swing, and you have the ideal jazz artist.

And it's Hill's keen mastery of swing and melody that propels **Impulse**, his fourth recording for Muse. Hill is complimented by his native D.C. cohorts, pianist Jon Ozment, bassist Carroll Dashiell, and drummer Warren Shadd. Hill's immediately pleasing sound that's so full of vinegar and honey and Dashiell's warm deep resonate tone give the quartet a passionate hot-blooded presence, while Shadd's supportive and responsive rhythmic grace and Ozment's impeccable fluency offer just the right amount of natural thrust and regal elegance. Together they make a delightful combo that draws the listener directly into the comfort zone. Within that zone, they explore an engaging collection of seven standards and three finely-etched originals.

Hill's three compositions typifies his artistry at setting a variety of moods. The exuberant uptempo "Random Walk" provides a perfect vehicle for Hill to showcase his

bebop prowess, while "Impulse" finds him beautifully caressing a lithe bossa-nova groove. On "Ottawa Bash" Hill's bluesy swagger gets greasier and funkier as Shadd kicks some infectious backbeat rhythms under Danshiell's outright funky basslines.

Hill is at his most poignant when it's just him and the melody as evident on his pithy reading of McCoy Tyner's "You Taught My Heart To Sing." A melody that's so definitive and inescapable that it almost consumes the entire composition, "You Taught My Heart To Sing" captures Hill's burly sunburst tone in pure elation. That glowing rapture also provides the life-blood for Legrand and Bergman's "How Do You Keep The Music Playing," in which Hill's rhapsodic reading reaches anthemic heights.

Impulse also reveals Hill as a formidable clarinetist. After fifteen years of self-teaching, this is the most extensive he's shown his clarinet skills on record. On record, Hill has only played clarinet on one tune from **Buck Hill Plays Europe** on the now-defunct Danish label, Turning Point. On this instrument, Hill hones a classic swing-era sound that's beautifully understated. On Ellington's "In A Sentimental Mood" and "Solitude" Hill's playing bears a striking resemblance to clarinet greats, Barney Bigard and Jimmy Hamilton, as he pensively approaches these compositions like a shy kid on a prom date. Then suddenly, Hill commences in a swing that's so elegant it would make Ellington proud. He effectively takes this same approach on Parker's "Now's The Time," before bursting into a comfortable mid-tempo groove.

Sweet lyricism, passionate deliveries, and luxurious swing, **Impulse** evokes the sultry spirit of swing/bebop era jazz that still captivates listeners with the simplicities of heartfelt melodies. In every true sense of the phrase, Buck Hill is a keeper of the flame, that incinerating fervor we call the blues.