

ABERCROMBIE-WALL-NUSSBAUM

Tactics (ECM)

Rating: ****1/2

By Ken Micallef

In its ongoing trend of exhuming all things '60s, jazz has rekindled its love affair with the grits-and-gravy organ trio. Exemplified by Jimmy Smith, Jack McDuff and Richard "Groove" Holmes, this romantic genre recalls an era of tiny, all-night clubs offering popular jazz from gritty urban centers like Philadelphia and Detroit, cities which were once rich with culture and life.

Thirty years after the fact, trying to recreate music born of industrial prosperity and gospel fervor can be a hollow task. Many labels have ushered in this prodigy or that soul confectioner equipped with quick fingers but typically lacking soul or creative vision. As Wynton won't tell you, music can't simply ape the past, it must reflect modern, everyday life.

Tactics exudes the sweat and slime of the greasiest organ trio jazz, but adds the swirling, netherworld vision that typifies the ECM label. Backed by the punch-drunk, chunk-o-funk drumming of Adam Nussbaum, guitarist John Abercrombie and organist Dan Wall spit and churn notes like some psilocybin-happy devil riding a bull in a tornado. "Chumbida" builds off a Latin rhythm, with Wall spreading a mushroom cloud while Abercrombie unleashes a torrent of wah-wah-wrecked one-liners; "Bo Diddy" finds a New Orleans fatback groove in soot-drenched picking and a raucous Bo Diddley drum tattoo. The trio also sails near the tornado's center, finding sweetness in standards like "You And Me And The Night Music" and "Long Ago And Far Away." Having worked in many configurations in the past, here the trio integrates years of experience into a sound that is equal parts mystery, majesty and gut-wrenching chops.

Recorded live at New York's Visiones in summer of 1996, *Tactics* lets you imbibe Scotch & soda at a small bar-side table while the band cooks, all from the comfort of your laptop linkup.