

Charlie Ballantine – Cold Coffee

(self-released)

by JAZZIZ



Restless, careening and dense with information, it's hard to imagine bebop developing anywhere other than New York City. Most contemporary jazz continues to reflect the environment of that hub, teeming with intricate grooves and maniacal precision. Guitarist-composer Charlie Ballantine, on the other hand, hails from Indiana. His

new trio recording, *Cold Coffee*, conveys a Midwestern openness with relaxed intensity.

In the vein of fellow guitarists like John Scofield, Bill Frisell and Julian Lage, Ballantine reconciles his educational background in jazz with the stylistic background of his instrument. He approaches the gratifying tonal and harmonic language of rock/roots with the groove, ambition and improvisational focus of a jazz musician. The title track, a baroque march, illustrates Ballantine's gift for crafting lyrical, dynamic compositions from a familiar color palette. "Zani" and "Moon City," tuneful slow grooves wet with nostalgia, also focus on phrasing and harmonic rhythm rather than the complexity of individual harmonies. The guitarist's solos, both patient and cavalier, capitalize on the earnest warmth within progressions that are more inviting than they are demanding.

In line with his fusion tendencies, Ballantine also subverts the devout modesty of jazz guitar's default tone (blunt warmth). His Telecaster's sharp attack trails rich waves of reverb and delay. When paired with Ballantine's feel-oriented approach to phrasing, this creates the paradoxical effect of being both expansive and intimate — an oceanic

lushness that conjures depth without obscuring the nuances of the guitarist's touch.

Drummer Chris Parker also errs toward the atmospheric, his liberal use of cymbals accentuating the spaciousness of Ballantine's sustained voicings, and bassist Jesse Wittman makes perfect use of this space. Hip, driving and deceptively funky, Wittman's grooves on the upright weave together nimble melodies and resonant low notes that curl with overtones. Together, the trio delivers a tasteful, sentimental and direct batch of tunes — perfect for a summer evening.— *Asher Wolf*