

stints with Richard "Groove" Holmes, Jack McDuff as well as Charles Earland. And Akiko's keyboard abilities are assuredly up to the task!

The leader's own "Sweet Yam Potato" is an in-the-pocket soul burner that grooves you with its relaxed beat. Right out of the gate the organist simultaneously demonstrates taste as a comping specialist and an incendiary lead player. The Charlie Chaplin chestnut "Smile" is appropriately sweet and done in a samba style. This naturally has a '60s lounge vibe, with lyrical solos all around and the ever present drive of drummer Petschauer. Wes Montgomery's "S.O.S." is urgent and fast paced as intricate accents move the groove along. "You Betcha" is another Akiko original that has all the makings of a soul-jazz classic. Its lively and somewhat angular head give way to a relaxed and cooking beat. Donny Hathaway's "Valdez in the Country" was a great choice for its vamp-ish structure and funky charm. IN particular, Akiko really steps out with some rocking rhythms and screaming leads. The leader embraces her Asian heritage with a cover of the classic '60s hit "Sukiyaki." In someone else's hands this tune might have come off a tad insincere or corny. But Akiko comes by it honestly and infuses it with whimsy and power. She also shows some range in her playing by altering the tonal palette of the organ itself. "What a Difference a Day Makes" is pretty straight ahead and, again, has a vintage lounge or tiki bar vibe.

Two other tracks of note are "Sakura," which Akiko utilizes as a vehicle to blend traditional Japanese melodies with western American improvisational music. Another of the leader's tunes "Showman's Boogaloo" is simply a fine and easy laid-back funky mid-tempo number.

There is a lot about this disc to like! Akiko Tsuruga plays with authority, passion, swing, soul and taste. From the very first notes on the B3 you're hooked and realize you are listening to a modern day master.



Gabriel Vicéns

POINT IN TIME – self-released
www.GabrielVicens.com. *El Comienzo; Point in Time; Intro to La Diferencia; La Diferencia; Intro to Cuadro; Cuadro; Beautiful Place; Intro to Frame of Mind; Frame of Mind; Intro to El Camino; El Camino; The World in My View.*

PERSONNEL: Gabriel Vicéns, electric guitar; Jonathan Suazo, alto sax; David Sanchez, tenor sax (5,8,12); Eduardo Zayas, piano; Matt Clohesy, bass; Eddie Gomez, bass (6,7,10,11); Vladamir Coronel, drums.

By Mark Keresman

While not a cutting-edge player (yet), Puerto Rican guitarist Gabriel Vicéns shows signs of being one of the new aces of main-

stream guitar. While many young-ish six-stringers follow Metheny and Frisell, Vicéns is, like Peter Bernstein, a "offspring" of Kenny Burrell and Grant Green. While not quite as bluesy as Burrell, he's got that clean, simmering, slightly shimmering, burnished tone that makes you feel as if it's midnight no matter when you're listening. (I'd love to hear Vicéns in a soul-jazz context with one of today's bosses of the Hammond B-3, but I digress.)

The opener is the slightly blues-tinged hunk of modality "El Comienzo"—it has a sleek, sly theme evoking Neal Hefti's tune-style. (Hefti was an arranger for Count Basie in the 1950s and composer of the 1960s *Batman* TV theme.) The title track brings to mind Blue Note-era Herbie Hancock (i.e., "Speak Like a Child," "Maiden Voyage") in its cozy but slightly bitter-sweet melodicism. Vicéns does a *sweet* solo with very minimal accompaniment, his notes splashing with a crystalline tone not unlike a vibraphone—then he and his band artfully and ratchet up the tension, gradually raising the excitement as if it were part of a Hitchcock film soundtrack. "La Diferencia" (and its "Intro") find Vicéns and pianist Eduardo Zayas engaging in some lyrical dialogues, the ensemble again subtly, crisply raising the levels of tension, Jonathan Suazo playing some swaggering, piquant, elegantly darting alto sax therein. (Vicéns really ought to consider writing film soundtracks.) Speaking of saxophone, special guest David Sánchez plays some hearty, celebratory tenor on the percolating, "Milestones"-esque "Cuadro."

"Frame of Mind" is the only track with any sort of rock influence—it has a loping, slightly ominous theme evoking Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir," and as a special added attraction, the buoyant, probing bass of Eddie Gomez, which in part gives "Frame" its baleful bounce. Gomez is also present on the ruminative mid-tempo "El Camino," the longest track here. The drumming of Vladamir Coronel is especially compelling here—thunderously seething and crackling, like a not-so-distant storm about to break.

There's plenty of ebb-and-flow here, as with most of the tracks of *Point*. Vicéns' tunes feature his guitar in harmonious tandem with the saxophone(s). His compositions are well-thought-out and a bit on the moody side (though never ponderous)—they're not just play-the-theme-and-jam frameworks, their swing falling on the side of the moody post-bop zone. This disc does conclude on an "up" note, with the faintly Steely Dan-ish "The World in My View." Vicéns' resourceful, impressive view is such that the Collective We will want to experience anew.

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"The welfare of the people in particular has always been the alibi of tyrants, and it provides the further advantage of giving the servants of tyranny a good conscience"

- Albert Camus