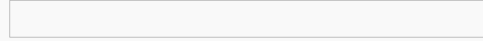

Raleigh Vibraphonist Hits Top Of Jazz Charts With New CD

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For the last three decades, Raleigh-based vibraphonist Steve Hobbs has gained respect and admiration from jazz fans all over the world. His straight-ahead, bebop, hard-swinging potency keeps him in demand and never without a gig.

His steady fame gave him the creative freedom to create his latest album, *Vibes, Straight Up*, his first effort as a player only, taking on the music of others. The album has maintained the No. 1 position on the Jazz Week charts for over four weeks and placed high in unexpected places, such as *Up with Florida*, a publication that usually rates jam bands.

Critics here and abroad are praising Hobbs for this new exploration with other people's music. He chose nine pieces, mostly pertaining to the South, improvising with an edgy style uniquely his own that expresses his passion for jazz while illuminating his roots as a Southern man. Hobbs jokes about fellow players being surprised by his accent, but he is dead serious when it comes to sending out a message through his music about what the South once was, how it has grown and how it stands today.

His inspiration for the recording grew out of his heritage as a Raleigh boy and his disappointment and concern with the stereotype that all Southerners are slack-jawed racists. If that were the case, says Hobbs, how could the South produce amazing jazz music?

Vibes, Straight Up is No. 1 in the Netherlands, home of his record company — Challenge/Twinz — but they wouldn't allow Hobbs to name this record *Down South* because of the possible backlash from Europeans who still hold the stereotype that the South is Disney World with ragtime music playing in the background. Hobbs points out that some central Europeans are "shit talkers" anyway, and that a lot of their "Eurojazz" — as he calls it — has "no rhythmic vitality."

The record company chose instead to use a shot of Lady Liberty for the album cover, and Hobbs is cool with that: The record is certainly a celebration of the South, but it also holds a New York edge. Through the music and his words in the CD insert, Hobbs feels his mission is accomplished.

He proudly confessed an e-mail from his personal hero, vibraphonist Mike Mainieri, made it all worthwhile: "Congrats on your CD! Downloaded it today on iTunes. You sound killin'!"

Joined by Bill O'Connell on piano, bassist Peter Washington and John Riley on drums, Hobbs was in familiar and enjoyable company. The quartet sailed through and recorded the album in about five hours, maybe four if you count lunch.

Between recording and touring, Hobbs devotes his time to the "wonderfully gifted and talented" Powell Elementary School in Raleigh where he teaches vocal music and directs a 27-member mallet ensemble consisting of glockenspiels, xylophones, marimbas, piano, drums and other instruments. Hobbs proudly states: "It's a cutting-edge school where teachers work together to teach kids reading and math through many mediums."

He is currently composing music with kindergarten kids, who already rhyme words they compose for lyrics. "All the teachers at Powell are teaching in multi-faceted ways ... it's pretty amazing. How's that for narrow-minded people from the South?"

Visit www.stevhobbs.com for more.

-Dan Reeves