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Updated: October 11, 2008 at 02:50 AM CDT

Jazz

Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra

Steppin' Out

(Independent)

ON their second release, the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra (WJO) has decided to tackle the Great American Songbook. With a cast of too many musicians to list here, the big band swings through several numbers, including Steppin' Out With My Baby and What is This Thing Called Love, both featuring vocalist Jennifer Hanson, and they also lie back into some gentle ballads, such as Henry Mancini's The Thought Behind Your Smile and Cole Porter's All of You.

Throughout the CD the playing is tight, agile and full of energy, and many of the arrangements by artistic director Richard Gillis and trumpeter Rick Boughton are top-notch. Trombone player Jeff Presslaff gets in on the arranging several times as well, and his three-part piece Oz Suite, which is based on a few themes from the Wizard of Oz, is particularly engaging and certainly the centrepiece of the whole recording.

After 11 years the WJO shows no signs of slowing down and, as this recording proves, they have matured into a solid and confident big band. 'Ö'Ö'Ö'Ö

-- Michael Wolch

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