

Sachal Vasandani Celebrates His Influences On *HI-FLY*, Available On Mack Avenue Records, June 21

"What makes a jazz singer has more to do with a set of tools and instincts, and by that measure Sachal qualifies as one of the stronger new arrivals in the field...The flexibility of Mr. Vasandani's phrasing would mark him as a jazz singer whether or not he ventured any scat choruses...he's a jazz singer with good ideas, including some about what a jazz singer can be."

- *New York Times*

With his breakthrough 2007 debut, *Eyes Wide Open*, vocalist/composer/arranger Sachal Vasandani established himself as one of the most promising voices in modern jazz. A 2010 DownBeat "Rising Star" poll winner, Vasandani presented his distinctive blend of jazz and pop with the critically acclaimed release, *We Move* in 2009.

Vasandani's third Mack Avenue release, **Hi-Fly**, confirms the high praise showered on its two predecessors and proves the singer is one of the freshest, most versatile artists to emerge onto the scene in recent memory. Produced by renowned Grammy® award winning bassist John Clayton and Grammy nominated Mack Avenue EVP of A&R Al Pryor, both long-time supporters, **Hi-Fly** is an exciting mix of standards, originals and pop covers showcasing Vasandani's ability to filter a wide range of material through his highly individual vision.

Where *We Move* was characterized by a sense of introspection and longing, **Hi-Fly** finds Vasandani in upbeat form. "On this record I wanted to share some of the joy of singing this music," Vasandani says. "I worked through the turbulence that inspired the last record and just tried to have fun. I was thinking less about drawing the listener into my heart and more about celebrating."

Nowhere is that celebratory spirit more pronounced than on "One Mint Julep," on which Vasandani is joined by the legendary Jon Hendricks, one of the originators of vocalese and a godfather of jazz vocals, whose presence is a ringing endorsement of the younger singer. Hendricks also returns on the title track, a Randy Weston composition for which he penned the lyrics.

It seems impossible to imagine anyone listening to the rollicking "One Mint Julep" without a smile on their face, from the obvious joy of the duo's romp through the gleefully antiquated lyric to their playful vocalese back-and-forth.

"As a young singer, anytime I get a chance to hang out with somebody like Jon it's humbling," says Vasandani. "Jon has a generous spirit and obviously knows how to collaborate, but he's going to be in the driver's seat just because he's Jon Hendricks. I found myself just enjoying the ride. He was pressing the accelerator and luckily I was sitting shotgun and not stuffed in the trunk."

Despite his modesty, Vasandani more than holds his own while sparring with the 89-year-old master, but he really spotlights his diverse talents on three original pieces he penned for the album. "Babes Blues" is a dedication to the singer's girlfriend and a chance for all involved to stretch out a bit, from Vasandani's soaring falsetto to thrilling solos from guests John Ellis (tenor sax) and Ambrose Akinmusire (trumpet).

"Flood" is the album's most heartrending track, inspired by recent natural disasters in Asia, Pakistan and Japan in particular. "That lyric was a personal response," he explains. "I'd hear about all this devastation in the news and it inspired this personal narrative. As artists, we try to feel and assess the pain of other people and put it out."

From the universal to the extremely personal (which is so often, of course, also universal), "Summer No School" looks back at playground romance. "I wanted to write a love song that was not so much about love now but love when you're younger. Musicians tend to talk about how we're feeling now as adults, so 'Summer No School' was a good chance to look backwards at my own past, not as a developing artist but as a developing young man."

A pleasant surprise on the disc is Amy Winehouse's "Love Is A Losing Game," reminiscent of a classic torch song, which Vasandani renders as a warm, last-call lament. "It's a great song about love and loss," he says, "which are themes that I've always gravitated to in my music and my writing."

Ultimately, Vasandani says, he selects material based not on its source but on his connection to the music and lyric, whether the song has an established, decades-long track record or is still climbing the pop charts.

"It's very simple," he claims. "I'm a modern person, I'm a modern singer, and standards have a place in my repertoire. There's a message in some if not all standards, with melodies that are so glorious and accessible on so many levels, and they're worth still being heard. If it's something that smacks of a certain corniness or makes me think of a bygone era that I'd rather forget, then I don't want to do it. But if it happens to be a good song called 'The Very Thought of You' that still makes sense, that resonates with you as an artist and helps you tell your own story that much more richly, then it's cool."

Vasandani's treatment of "The Very Thought of You" highlights his more accessible, extroverted concept for the album. Usually played as a ballad, Vasandani maintains intimacy in the delivery of the lyric, while relying on the band to infuse a greater sense of movement. That request is met admirably by the addition of Kendrick Scott (drums) into the rhythm section, lending an urgent pulse to propel the songs forward.

Scott joins Vasandani's longtime collaborators Jeb Patton (piano) and David Wong (bass), who have appeared on each of his releases. Partners as well in the Heath Brothers quartet, Patton and Wong have a long history together illustrated by their intimate rapport.

"I like to play with people who are not only great musicians, which I'm fortunate to say all the people who participate on my records are, but also open, whether it's trying out new things or just putting their own stamp on existing things. These guys really know how to breathe new life into music that's been in our repertoire for a while, and that requires a certain humility and a certain commitment—a commitment to make great music at all times. There's a certain luxury I take in trusting that they're going to be open to all the different ways in which we stretch ourselves."