

**BTWHSPVA  
Jazz Combo 1  
Tribute:  
James Kings  
Jr. Memorial  
Album**

(SELF-RELEASE)  
★★★

On the evening of March 28, 2008, gifted 18-year-old drummer James Kings Jr. was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver on a Dallas street. His loss was immediately felt by his classmates at Booker T. Washington High School, particularly by Jazz Combo 1, a talented group (under the direction of Bart Marantz) that has received



multiple Grammy, Down-Beat and NFAA awards.

*Tribute's* opening track, "Solar," shows Kings' talent in full flower, the young drummer's clear sticking, flowing ideas and rapid-fire commentary recalling a young Tony Williams or Bill Stewart. Mixing intricate hi-hat patterns with crisp cymbal rhythms, Kings swung with a great sense

of purpose, on a streamlined bed of air. *Tribute* documents the memorial concert that followed later that year, featuring drummers Jeff "Tain" Watts and Carl Allen with Jazz Combo 1, also accompanied by the group's other drummers,

past and present.

Performing standards and original compositions, Jazz Combo 1 proves their mettle for a band of what are essentially teenagers, showing considerable maturity in soloing skills, accompaniment chops and overall musicality. If these students constitute the future of jazz, all is well. Given the nature of the memorial, there is a slight cast of sadness over the music, particularly felt on "Maiden Voyage" and "Someday My Prince Will Come." The CD closes with Carl Allen's solo, "March On James, March On," a somber elegy in rhythm.

—Ken Micallef

**Tribute:** James Kings Jr. Memorial Album: Solar; Maiden Voyage; Someday My Prince Will Come; Jasmine Pearls; Softly As In A Morning Sunrise; Beautiful Spirit; Isotope; J.D.K.; King James; What A Wonderful World; March On James, March On.

**Personnel:** James Kings Jr., Jeff "Tain" Watts, Carl Allen, Mike Drake, Andrew Griffith, Robert "Sput" Searight, Tony Gutierrez, drums; Luke Marantz, piano; Jordan Pettay, alto sax; Kevin Bach, Braylon Lacy, bass; James Kings Sr., vocals/piano.

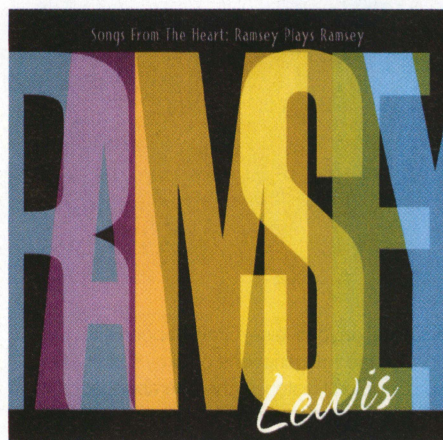
Ordering info: [btwhspts.org/jazz.htm](http://btwhspts.org/jazz.htm)

**Ramsey Lewis  
Songs From The Heart:  
Ramsey Plays Ramsey**

CONCORD JAZZ 31313  
★★½

To mark his debut release on Concord Jazz, Lewis presents a selection of his own tunes, recently composed. *Songs From The Heart* demonstrates that Lewis' skills as a writer are solid and steady, if not illuminated by the inspiration he displays consistently as a player.

None of these dozen tracks is haphazardly conceived. Many of them grow from promising motifs: "Exhilaration" begins with a two-whole-tone episode, imaginatively voiced, grounded and infused with expression by Larry Gray's bowed bass. However, this devolves quickly into an unaccompanied bass improvisation, which in turn leads to a blues-changes piano solo, which Lewis plays with taste and understatement. Here and there, he alters his right-hand line or harks briefly to the opening, but for all intents and purposes we're back to the three-chord basics. The intro remains set aside,



neglected as a compositional element and only revisited as a recap at the end.

The point is not to pick on "Exhilaration" or any of these previously unrecorded works. The best of them create a positive impression, among them "The Glow Of Her Charm," one of the album's three solo piano moments. Lewis caresses this gently crafted piece with love and sensitivity, altering tempo and dynam-

ics, bristling harmonies and silences that pause like held breath, all of which centers around an elegant figure in thirds before resolving on an unadorned major triad. In fact, everything here reflects Lewis' knack for wafting a steamy, positive blues feel through compositions that are sophisticated and even complex and yet eminently listenable.

What, then, is the problem? There are two: First, in part because these arrangements leave lots of room for the band to interact, the groove sometimes becomes just a little elusive; a stumbling coda nearly derails the train that the trio had ridden through "To Know Her Is to Love Her." And, for all the craft these songs display, nothing much lingers beyond the final chords. As an artist, Lewis has much to say; he just says it better when other hands help build his platform.

—Robert L. Doerschuk

**Songs From The Heart:** Ramsey Plays Ramsey: To Know Her Is to Love Her; Touching, Feeling, Knowing; Clouds In Reverie; The Spark; Conversation; The Way She Smiles; Exhilaration; The Glow Of Her Charm; Rendezvous; Long Before She Knew; Sharing Her Journey; Watercolors. (74:44)

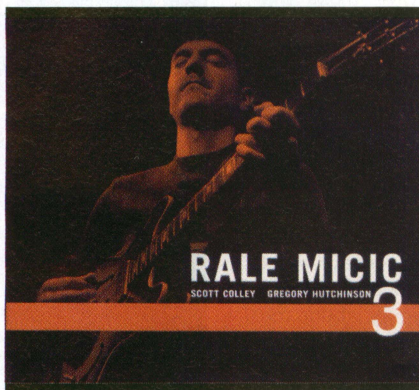
**Personnel:** Ramsey Lewis, piano; Larry Gray, bass; Leon Joyce, drums.

Ordering info: [concordmusicgroup.com](http://concordmusicgroup.com)

**Rale Micic  
3**

CTA 008  
★★★

This is the third release on CTA for the Serbian-born guitarist Rale Micic. Now based in New York City, Micic gets strong support on 3 from bassist Scott Colley and drummer Gregory Hutchinson. And 3 is a good place to get a shot of Micic's talent not only as a hollow-bodied guitarist but composer as well (eight of the 10 tracks here are his).



Starting off with his riff-based, slightly samba-ized "Dealin'," the mood is calm, somewhat pensive, with no flashy technique on display (3 is anything but flashy). "The World Doesn't End" continues the quiet, intimate pace, this time the modal structure coaxed along with a gentle swing and Micic's even mix of single notes and chords recalling a simpler Pat Metheny in a similar vein. And while 3 is essentially a trio album, Micic does use additional musicians at the end of his popular "Serbology," giving the music a slightly

similar vein. And while 3 is essentially a trio album, Micic does use additional musicians at the end of his popular "Serbology," giving the music a slightly

Balkan feel with traditional Serbian percussion instruments (the tarabuka and tapan), and an additional acoustic guitar on 3's best cut, his wistful, almost folksy ballad "Pannonia."

The two covers, Cole Porter's "I Love You" and "The Night Has A Thousand Eyes" (sounding a lot like Porter's "Love For Sale"), become opportunities to hear how Micic takes a couple of American standards and translates them into his more composed, modest style of playing. Hutchinson and Colley always playing behind and under the guitarist. There are no fireworks here, just solid, straightforward swinging.

—John Ephland

**3:** Dealin'; The World Doesn't End; I Love You; Serbology; Pannonia; Naive Art; Three Of A Kind; Thirty Three; The Night Has A Thousand Eyes; Gybanitza. (56:51)

**Personnel:** Rale Micic, guitar; Scott Colley, bass; Gregory Hutchinson, drums.

Ordering info: [ctarecords.com](http://ctarecords.com)