

## **My Conception - All Music Guide – Ken Dryden**

Peter Zak's third Steeplechase CD is his first solo piano outing and he makes the most of the opportunity. Encouraged by fellow pianist Fred Hersch to imagine being in the living room at home, Zak's imaginative studio session blends stunning originals with a few overlooked gems written during the height of the hard bop era and standards. The pianist's lyrical "Shala" is a shining example of his abilities as a composer, comparable to the likes of Bill Evans, Denny Zeitlin, Fred Hersch or any solo pianist you can name, without mimicking any of them. His "The Camel" is exotic, though it is up-tempo bop with lots of sudden changes in direction and not anything like the lumbering desert animal. Zak's thoughtful exploration of Sonny Clark's "My Conception" and jaunty take of Cal Massey's "These Are Soulful Days" are two examples of composers worth investigating who have been overlooked since their premature deaths. The pianist dives headfirst into the upbeat calypso "Fungii Mama" (written by the late trumpeter Blue Mitchell) and offers a light-hearted interpretation of Joe Henderson's "Serenity" as well. The standards are gathered toward the end of the CD, but that isn't because they aren't as striking as the other performances. "Witchcraft" incorporates a few rhythmic twists and inventive chord substitutions, while his deliberate approach to "With a Song in My Heart" unveils Richard Rodgers' gift for creating timeless melodies and incorporates a touch of melancholy. Zak's rollicking treatment of "By Myself" serves as a perfect finale to a flawless record date.