MILES STIEBEL: MIDNIGHT FIFTY

TRACK Midnight Fifty

ARTIST Miles Stiebel (violin)

CD Excellent Distraction (MSE Productions)

BUY THIS TRACK

Musicians: Miles Stiebel (violin), Kevin Burns, Mike Crotty (trumpets), Ben Patterson (trombone), Pete BarenBregge (alto sax), Doug Morgan (baritone sax), Dan Reynolds (piano, synthesizer), Gerry Kunkel (guitar), Mark Russell (electric bass), Steve Fidyk (drums), Sam Turner (percussion). Composed by Miles Stiebel.

Recorded: Springfield, VA, date unknown; released January 2009

RATING: 90/100 (learn more)

Miles Stiebel leads an orchestra that is in demand for political and corporate events in and around the Washington, DC, area, and is also president of an entertainment agency he founded in 1983. While his *Excellent Distraction* might provide too concentrated a dose of "contemporary jazz" for the hard-core jazz listener, there's no denying the excellent musicianship of these players. Also, it's refreshing to hear an accomplished violinist as the lead voice in a genre that is almost exclusively dominated by saxophonists.

The first track, "Midnight Fifty," provides perhaps the most straight-ahead, non-formulaic performance on the release, with an attractive arrangement by Stiebel and guitarist Gerry Kunkel. The horn section is vigorously tight, and Fidyk maintains a driving but not overbearing backbeat throughout. After Stiebel intones his soulful, infectious theme, he delivers an exhilarating solo with a piercing tone and expressive phrasing. BarenBregge's promising wailing alto solo is regrettably short, but pianist Reynolds has longer to show off his creatively melodic talent. There follows an unusual arranged section that pairs the spirited horns with meandering, wispy synthesizer washes. Stiebel then treats us to his likable theme once again to take out this winning piece.

Reviewer: Scott Albin