



Al Maniscalco Quartet

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CD Title: [More In My Heart](#)

Review: Al Maniscalco is one of those musicians of distinctive talent who choose to remain in a city of their choice—one that meets family goals, offers educational opportunities or provides a hometown advantage—rather than moving on to acclaim in the jazz centers of New York, Los Angeles or Chicago. The reduced nationwide acclaim due to less exposure is not a function of the musician's degree of talent. Indeed, excellence of talent exists independently from commercial success or broad recognition. Rather, Maniscalco made the decision to pursue a musical career regionally, raising the bar for the jazz scene in his home city.

The city that Maniscalco chose to settle in is Baltimore. As a first-call saxophonist, Maniscalco has played with some of the top names in entertainment who tour in that region. Names like Tony Bennett, Chuck Mangione, Branford Marsalis, Valery Ponomarev or Curtis Lundy. But Maniscalco's third CD, *More In My Heart*, proves that the sideman for nationally known performers has some thoughts of his own to express through the leadership of his own group. With a varied musical interests, a rich appealing tone and fluid technique, Maniscalco, by the evidence of the recording, possesses a heart as well...one that comes across in the music he plays, one that is reflected in the title of the CD. Indeed, the influence of the heart, which governs the direction of the music, appears as Nicholas Gordon's poem in the liner notes, providing a clue to the theme for the CD. And so, in spite of—or because of—his ease in expressing the thoughts that cross his mind as he improvises on saxophone, Maniscalco solidly connects to the listener with the feeling that invests his playing.

Maniscalco's quartet claims the listener's attention immediately at the start of *More In My Heart* with Eddie Harris-like funk on "Circumference." Keyboardist George Colligan is well aware of the style as well as he backs up Maniscalco on Fender Rhodes, the initial vamp on tenor sax evolving into the structure of the song. Bill Evans' "Time Remembered" receives appropriate ethereal treatment as Maniscalco, rather than Colligan on keyboard as would be expected, takes the lead. Maniscalco stamps his own personality onto the tune by adapting it to a 5/4 meter, leading to unexpected shifting of modulations keeping the listener alert, never quite sure when the changes will occur due to the additional beat inserted into each measure.

But things are not all serious in Maniscalco's heart. "A Nice Walk In The Park" does indeed suggest an insouciant stroll, which he describes with an uplift on soprano sax. Colligan is at his Fender Rhodes best to lighten the touch and add to the tune's carefree spirit. Then there's "Al's The Things You Are," which is based upon the changes of, yes, "All The Things You Are," but not so obviously so at first. With vivacity and a burliness of tenor sax tone, Maniscalco stretches the song's fabric and then lets it snap with displaced accents, fashioning his own song on the same chords until he finally removes the mystery and reveals the familiar melody itself. On "More In My Heart," Maniscalco's quartet abandons metrical confinement to spread out in rubato fashion as he takes his time to develop individualized expressiveness, as if the song were flowing from the heart and affecting the rest of the group, particularly Colligan's gorgeous solo. Laying bare Maniscalco's feelings through music, *More From My Heart* is a triumph of emotionalism over intellectualism.

Reviewed by: Don Williamson

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