

# AUDIOBEAT

## Kevin Hays and Lionel Loueke

### ● *Hope*

[Newvelle Records](#) NV008LP

180-gram LP

2017

by [Guy Lemcoe](#) | October 13, 2017

If I'm beginning to sound like a broken record with my praise for the by-subscription releases from Newvelle Records, blame the people responsible for these LPs, which consistently rise to the top in terms of music and sound. This release is no exception. Inside the heavyweight gatefold jacket is another superb record from a company whose presentations are setting standards for original music. The eighth Newvelle release, *Hope* features New York native Kevin Hays on piano, who comes to this recording with an impressive resume, having worked with such jazz luminaries as Sonny Rollins, Benny Golson, Ron Carter, Art Farmer, John Scofield and Roy Haynes. His partner, West African guitarist Lionel Loueke, is equally credentialed, playing alongside Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Joe Lovano, Wayne Shorter, Kenny Barron and Jack DeJohnette. Piano/guitar duos are not as common as other instrumental combinations. At the moment, my memory recalls the legendary Bill Evans/Jim Hall collaborations *Undercurrent* and *Intermodulation*. Recorded in the 1960s, the music on those recordings is sublime. *Hope* joins those iconic albums with a selection of mostly original numbers performed in a warm, intimate atmosphere.

"Violeta," side one's opener, is a Hays original dedicated to the late Chilean singer, songwriter and folklorist Violeta Parra. It is an infectious, rhythmic samba with both musicians thinking as one while they traverse the number's changes. The subtle vocalizing is captivating and lends a distinct Latin air. The title tune is a dreamy, introspective number by Loueke reflecting hope in the midst of difficult times. Softly stroked lyrical guitar plays off over a wash of supporting, equally lyrical piano with the almost-not-there vocal lending mystery to the song. The emotion conjured echoes the producer's description of the song as one of "peace and love." "Aziza Dance" is just that -- a jaunty, dancing tune reflecting the musical heritage and mythology of West Africa. (Aziza are forest-dwelling, beneficent, supernatural entities.) The side ends with a Hays arrangement of "Feuilles-O," a traditional Haitian healing song. Hays sings the lovely melody in Haitian Creole as Loueke accompanies on guitar. Later on, Loueke provides some fine percussive effects on his guitar solo while vocalizing à la George Benson.

As if overhearing a nearby conversation, Hays opens side two with "Milton," which just materializes out of a guitar-and-falsetto-voice intro into a sprightly 5/4 dance rhythm, paying due homage to famed Brazilian singer, songwriter and guitarist Milton Nascimento, for whom it was written. The exuberance, spirit and color of Brazil's carnival celebrations permeate this music. "Twins" is a very personal flowing ode penned by Loueke for a friend and father of a pair of newborns. "Veuve Malienne," another by Loueke, is a restless tune that left me listening for some sort of resolution. It did not come, though, and left me hanging. The album's closer, Hays's "All I Have," is a beautiful, softly sung tune addressing the often difficult task of uncovering spiritual truth when it is obscured by the machinations of our material world.

As before, the resplendent sound of the 180-gram opaline LP, by Marc Urselli at Manhattan's East Side Sound, was beautifully mastered at Masterdisk by Alex DeTurk. The LP plays dead quiet, thanks to a superb pressing at MPO in France. Photos from the collection of Tendance Floue once again grace the cover and inside the gatefold jacket -- all artfully fashioned by Antoine Leroux of Autrement le design. There are two inner sleeves: one plain white and lined with vinyl-friendly tissue paper, the other thicker and glossy with notes from producer Elan Mehler.

If you're already a Newvelle Records subscriber, you know what to expect from *Hope*, and you will not be disappointed. If you are not a subscriber, there is no reason to hold back. This music will enrich your spirit.