

Mark Turner

Mark Turner's self-titled solo debut for Warner Bros. Records is indicative of the open-minded curiosity that is leading the best of today's young musicians toward maturity. Turner is hearing a lot of music, as do we when Turner plays.

The inclusive approach found on Mark Turner is something the accomplished tenor saxophonist has cultivated. "Trane was my first, biggest interest," Turner admits, when complimented on the personal slant he has given John Coltrane's "26-2." "If you ask my college friends, they will tell you that I was into Trane big time. Over time, though, there were other kinds of lines and sounds I wanted to obtain, other people I wanted to check out. If I was thrown into a different situation back then, I couldn't hear it - so, since then, I've thrown myself into the widest array of situations possible."

Discipline and focus of this sort have given Turner's music its character. Born in Ohio on November 10, 1965, and raised in California from the age of four, his childhood passion for music was matched by an equal gift for the visual arts. Like Duke Ellington and Sonny Rollins, Turner was initially headed for a career as an illustrator. He studied art for a time at Long Beach College before transferring to Berklee. "Obviously the mediums are different, in that music happens in the moment and art doesn't in the same way," he notes, "but I see a lot of similarities in the creative processes. The connection is not that literal, though. You could be a great bricklayer. or a great chef; if you derive the same feeling from doing something completely different, it's bound to shed light and new meaning."

Turner did opt for music, though, and his Berklee experience brought him into contact with a cohort of technically proficient and intellectually voracious young musicians. The circle has only widened since he moved to New York. "If I did not play a lot of sessions with my peers, I would not be where I am now," he insists. "Contemporaries of mine like Seamus Blake, Josh Redman and Chris Cheek have influenced me as much as any of the great records I've heard. People I went to school with like Kurt Rosenwinkel have been big influences, plus others I've met in New York like Jeff Ballard. We have a thing, playing with each other in sessions, checking each other out. That's what people in my generation have now."

While Turner has been fortunate enough to record with veterans like James Moody and Jimmy Smith, and to work with the Tana Reid quintet, he correctly points out that "You can't have the kind of apprenticeship that existed 20 years ago - how many bands are there? So a lot of us end up setting up sessions. Smalls is the best known of the places we play, but there are all these little bars in the East Village. It changes every six months; you just have to walk around to find the music."