

Roland Vazquez *The Visitor*

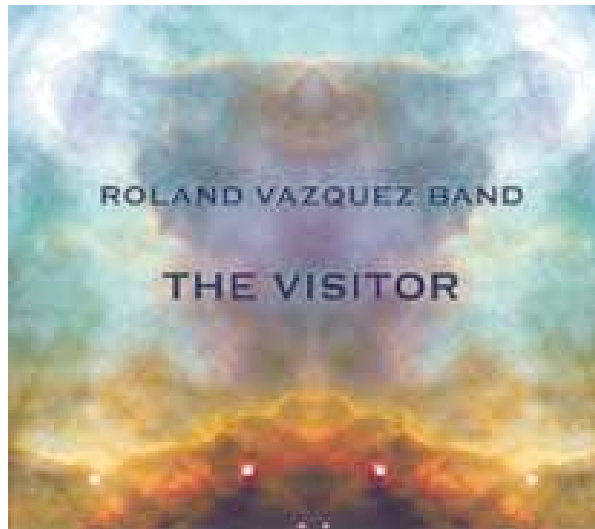
RVD 7007

★★★★½

In the seven compositions that make up this ambitious project, composer-drummer Roland Vazquez applies an orchestral colorist's ear to a big band's 13-horn palette, moving in Afro-Cuban time with a foundation of clave, tumbao and montuno.

The result stands up to repeated listening. The star of *The Visitor* is Vazquez's luminous, precise writing, with an intriguing rhythm section of first-class New York-based players that effectively functions as an orchestra within the orchestra, playing from written-out parts. Vazquez is up front, conducting instead of playing, so for his drummer's drummer, he calls on Ignacio Berroa, whose insistent hat and cymbal drive the train and provide a grid for the percussive commentary of conguero Samuel Torres and the album's most frequent soloist, pianist Luis Perdomo. Instead of the more predictable upright, there's electric bassist James Genus, while electric guitar and vibes make for a welter of orchestral doublings that fuse now with the piano, now with brass and reeds.

The drums seem a little lower in the mix than is usual these days, leaving their kinetic function unimpaired while making more playspace for



the shifting densities of the horn voicings. The harmony is continually surprising, the structural bag of tricks is deep, and despite the music's serious mien, the orchestration is playful. The big-group live-miking by Todd Whitelock admirably exploits the sound of one of the few still-extant classic New York

rooms, Clinton Studio A (where Perdomo played his piano parts on the *Kind Of Blue* Steinway D).

All the compositions are by Vazquez, except for an arrangement of "Guarabé" by Clare Fischer, with whom Vazquez played. It feels like a single large work with many smaller parts; with the shortest cut clocking in at eight-and-a-half minutes, the listener may not perceive ends-and-begins. *The Visitor* is one more indication that the present generation of composers and performers has reimagined the orchestra from the rhythm up. Kudos to the Aaron Copland Fund for Music for helping underwrite it.

—Ned Sublette

The Visitor: Urantia; Thru A Window; The Visitor; Whirlpool; Sevilla; Guarabé; The Path Of Change. (72:34)

Personnel: Roland Vazquez, composer/conductor; Aaron Heick, Ben Kono, Joel Frahm, Dan Willis, Roger Rosenberg, saxophones/reeds; Jon Owens, Tony Kadleck, James de la Garza, Alex Norris, trumpets/flugelhorns; Keith O'Quinn, Larry Farrell, Tim Albright (1–5), Isrea Butler (6, 7), Jack Schatz, trombones; Luis Perdomo, piano; Pete McCann, guitar; James Genus, electric bass; Ignacio Berroa, drums; Samuel Torres, congas, percussion; Jim Herschman, guitar (4); Christos Rafaelides, vibes (1–3); Sean Ritanauer, vibes (4, 5, 7).

Ordering info: rolandvazquez.com