

## THE JONES O'CONNOR GROUP "A CROW FOR EVERY CROW" (JOC RECORDS 001)

This own label release is the second album from the Cardiff based Jones O'Connor Group. Their debut recording "Alpha" (2005) was very well received but this new recording sees the group refining their approach and displaying clear signs of growth. Successful festival appearances at both Brecon and the Jazz In The Park event in Pontypool/Torfaen have raised the group's profile and this excellent new album deserves to gain them national attention. All four members of the group are established figures on the vibrant South Wales scene and play in a variety of bands but this is the combination most likely to break out and find a larger audience. The Jones O'Connor group play a brand of intelligent fusion that should also hold some appeal to discerning rock listeners. Paul Jones plays both piano and electric keyboards and combines superbly with the guitar of his namesake Richard. The O'Connor half of the equation, bassist Chris and drummer Mark are a flexible and intelligent rhythm team, equally adept at handling tricky time signatures as at laying down a propulsive groove. The interaction between all four members is always excellent and the quality of the writing, shared pretty much equally by the Jones boys (Paul writes five tunes and Richard four) is consistently high. The tunes feature attractive melodies and strong grooves but are also full of interesting and sometimes complex ideas. There are echoes of seventies British jazz rock as parlayed by the likes of the Canterbury Scene bands and Nucleus but the rhythms laid down by the O'Connors speak of more modern influences such as Polar Bear and Led Bib. They even hint at hip-hop grooves from time to time. The result is an accessible and quirky melange of influences with plenty to savour as snatches of melody combine with riffs and grooves on the colourful compositions. Guitar and keyboard dovetail together like a spiky Welsh version of Pat Metheny and Lyle Mays. The quality of the writing and the band's sense of fun ensures that the music is never guilty of the kind of bombast that gave fusion a bad name in the first place. "No Wave" with its cheesy sounding synths and what sounds suspiciously like a voice bag is the group at their most retro but one senses their collective tongue is firmly in their cheek. There are number excellent solos over the course of the album but these are always central to the mood of the piece and never detract from the overall atmosphere. Richard Jones is a talented electric guitarist who deploys his effects tastefully and purposefully but can rock out when required. He is particularly impressive on his own "Dead Ahead" Paul Jones' keyboards are vital to the group sound both texturally and as a soloist. He is equally adept on both acoustic and electric instruments. His gently trilling Rhodes solo on "Pumpkin" is a particular highlight. The qualities of the rhythm section have been outlined above and both are excellent throughout. They lay down an awesome groove on the opening title track and maintain that kind of quality for the rest of the album. Picking out individual tracks is difficult as the overall quality of the record is so high. From Kirsten McTernan's distinctive artwork to the music itself everything is a clear progression from the already promising "Alpha". I saw the group at Brecon in 2005 at the time of "Alpha" and again at Jazz In The Park this year just before this album was released. I was highly impressed on both occasions and was eagerly awaiting hearing this album. "A Crow For Every Crow" lived up to my expectations and more and deserves to put the group on the national (and maybe international) jazz map.

### CRITIC RATING 4 STARS

"Quirky, accessible, intelligent fusion with a high standard of writing and playing throughout. This album deserves to put the group well and truly on the jazz map."