



CD REVIEW Nov. 7, 2006

[jazzelements.com](http://jazzelements.com)

CD Review / Big Band Jazz  
Prime Time Big Band / *for our Friends*  
Last Blast Band Inc. / 2006

reviewed by **Cindy McLeod**

As rare as hen's teeth these days, the Canadian Big Bands that continue to thrive on the scene in spite of the challenges are there because they perform great music and showcase great talent. Without the large college circuit that is the backbone of the US Big Band market, it is increasingly more difficult for Canadian bands to find venues that can accommodate those numbers. Yet the music draws a loyal audience and players love to perform the orchestrations, so thankfully this combined enthusiasm and support keeps the vital genre alive.

Such is the case with Prime Time Big Band, a Calgary-based unit that holds down the only regular club date in the nation, performing bi-monthly at a local establishment for over a dozen years. Under the leadership of trumpeter/conductor Dave Jones, the 19 piece ensemble continues to warm hearts with it's first-rate musicianship and music that spans time and styles from the Big Band Era to today's contemporary pop, jazz, and adult/contemporary genres. Local singer Shari Chaskin graces the sound with her powerful voice, lending the leading edge to the mix.

With a repertoire that numbers over 500 songs, the group recently chose 13 of them to create their debut CD *for my Friends*. over sixty minutes of lush arrangements artfully performed by the ensemble and featuring standout solos by band members, as well as four tracks showcasing Chaskin's vocals. JUNO Award-winning saxophonist P.J. Perry makes a notable guest appearance, lending his sterling sound to two tracks.

Starting with Don Menza's *Groovin' Hard*, this medium swing reading does indeed groove, with the horns carrying the lyrical melody and drummer John DeWaal driving the crisp sound. Pat Belliveau contributes a fine tenor sax solo that leads into a dynamic horn section 'solo' before the ensemble re-enters to build the energetic finish. *5-5-7* is a melodic jazz composition written by Pat Metheny and Lyle Mays, and has a gorgeous Latin-funk feel with a pulse suspending the buoyant melody over its evolving time signature. Guitarist Ralf Buschmeyer and the soprano sax of Richard Harding put the finishing touches on the track and are the perfect choice of soloists for this contemporary sound. The memorable *Lonely Carousel*, a jazz waltz masterfully played by Al Muirhead on flugelhorn, is a captivating rendition of this Bob Florence gem, and features Muirhead's thoughtful performance

and sublime obligatto ending. P.J. Perry's distinctive voice comes clearly through on his *Nicolia*, with Buschmeyer's fiery guitar kicking off the tune and the band carving out a slice of urban blues; Perry's soprano describes it's edgy swing feel with his lively performance. The saxophonist makes a second featured appearance on the title track *for my Friends*, choosing his soprano for this Jill Townsend composition and sharing the spotlight with tenor man Jim Brenan for extended solos over the half-time funk feel, drizzling be-bop lines over the layered horns that build to a crescendo. *Sands of Time*, a gorgeous Phil Nimmons contribution, offers a pulsing rhythm laid down by Derek Stoll's Fender-Rhodes piano, and showcases the superb horn work of saxophonists Jim Brenan (tenor), and Eric Friedenber (alto), as well a tasteful solo by bassist Kai Poscente.

Vocalist Chaskin shines on *My One and Only Love* as she melts the lyrics with her tender read on the first half and belting out the second, taking the composition by storm. The arrangement builds with a brassy 6/8 feel on the bridge, adding a bold colour to the Wood/Mellin peice and drawing the standard into a modern pop feel, with Bob Day's refined flugelhorn lending a modern jazz affect. The vocalist jump starts the heart with her take on *I Got a Touch of Your Love*, showing off her impressive range for this commanding performance, then switches gears for the Mercer/Arlen jewel *Come Rain or Come Shine*, rendered in a lazy 6/8 feel that segues into a punchy 4/4 swing, creating tension and release as the arrangement moves back and forth between the two and builds to a powerful vocal ending. Shari contributes another strong performance on *Deedle's Blues*, making the Diane Schur composition her own with her self-assured delivery, while saluting the great vocalist.

With something for everyone, *for my Friends* offers rich tones of swing, Latin, pop, and blues, all performed impeccably by some of the finest in Canadian jazz. This recording is sure to not only put Prime Time Big Band on the map in this country, but is bound to gain them international attention. Recommended.

*Tune into John Reid's "Canadian Music Centre Presents" on CJSW Radio, 90.9 FM. at CJSW on Tuesday morning to hear an interview with Dave Jones!*