

## Arts : Music

### Bebopper's awaited follow-up entertains



By Andrew Horowitz, Daily Arts Writer  
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Two years after releasing the critically acclaimed *Leaving Home*, composer/pianist David Berkman returns with the stellar *Start Here, Finish There*. This outing once again finds Berkman honing his ability to create idiosyncratic tunes within the context of traditional jazz. His refined compositions are met with vigor by the accomplished quartet, which includes saxophonist Dick Oatts, bassist Ugonna Okegwo and drummer Nasheet Waits.

*Start Here* opens with "Cells," a ballad with an intervallic melody on top of peculiar chord changes. Oatts's fluid tone produces a melancholy effect that continues from the first note onward. His sound is an intrinsic match for Berkman, becoming apparent in the melodic doublings and solos. Berkman's playing, like Oatts, is reserved and understated, and his technical ability takes a back seat to compositional premise. As the album progresses, his reserve is relentless, almost to a fault.

Not until four choruses into Berkman's solo of the album's second tune, the quirky blues "Triceratops," do we hear the pianist's bebop dexterity. Berkman instead experiments with timbre, tonality, harmony and fragmented melodic ideas, emphasizing ingenuity over pianistic virtuosity.

Perhaps the strongest testament to Berkman's talent lies in his diverse stylistic knowledge. The brief "English as a Second Language" demonstrates comfort with modern atonal concert music, sonically alluding to the confusion inherent in the title's subject. "Old Forks" retains the feel of a standard, but moderately progresses to the point of discordant freedom. Oatts solos without piano accompaniment, creating a seemingly irrelevant harmonic structure.

In a language overcome with virtuosity and showmanship, Berkman is the rare example of a jazz musician who sacrifices ego for the greater musical cause. Although his ideas sometimes falter (as in the lagging "Iraq"), these shortcomings are easily overlooked. *Start Here* is an accomplished effort, an uncompromised realization of a composer's vision.

Rating: 3.5 out of 5 stars