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## Shelly Berg Trio Blackbird

Concord Records

By **Doug Ramsey**

Shelly Berg is best known outside Los Angeles as an accompanist, composer, arranger, film scorer and educator. His reputation as a jazz pianist gets a boost with this CD, his first on a label with wide distribution. His performance warrants the greater exposure. Joined by two other studio stalwarts with sturdy jazz chops, bassist Chuck Berghofer and drummer Gregg Field, Berg plays a program balanced among standards, originals and pieces drawn from pop songwriters. He impresses with transformations of songs by Stevie Wonder, Billy Joel and Lennon and McCartney, but shines brightest with substantial fare like "If I Should Lose You" and "All the Things You Are." The trio eases into the latter, builds intensity through a Berghofer solo and an exchange of eight-bar phrases between piano and drums, then Berg slides into the final chorus with a series of soft glissandos—a lovely moment.

Berg's continuity between melodic line and powerful left-hand counter-punching is impressive on "I Hear a Rhapsody." His touch, dynamics and voicings impart substance and tenderness to the ballads "A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing," "Estate" and his own "Julia," an attractive slow waltz. He plays Pat Metheny's "Question and Answer" in 3/4 time and just a shade faster than Metheny did with Dave Holland and Roy Haynes, giving it lightness and compelling vigor supplied in great part by Field's filigree brush work. Berg, Berghofer and Field operate together with empathy. There's a lot of listening going on. This is not just another recording of a pianist with accompaniment, but a unified trio.

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