



The Nearness of You

Shelly Berg

Arbors

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A brilliant pianist who is often compared to Oscar Peterson, Shelly Berg is also a well-respected educator. He taught at USC for 16 years, was president of the IAJE from 1996 to 1998 and is now dean of the University of Miami's Frost School of Music.

Despite his playing talents, *The Nearness of You* is only Berg's fifth CD as a leader and his first set of unaccompanied solos. While the pianist is quite comfortable at rapid tempos most of this music is taken at a slower pace. The standards feature strong melodies, superior chord changes, and an openness that allows Berg to use subtle creativity to modernize and alter aspects of the songs. He uses his own fresh chord voicings and proves expert at building up solos even while always keeping the melody in sight.

The Nearness of You includes three-song *My Fair Lady* and *Guys and Dolls* medleys that flow particularly well. "On the Street Where You Live" and "If I Were a Bell" are cooked at length. The other seven standards are full of melodic development and little surprises that make the pieces sound contemporary rather than several decades old. Shelly's Berg's thoughtful solos are so accessible that they disguise the complexity of his ideas, but other pianists trying to duplicate his improvisations will quickly learn how difficult it is to come up with playing on this level.