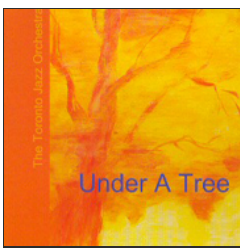




**Nova Jazz Orchestra / UNT One
O'Clock Lab Band / Frank Macchia
/ Omar Sosa & NDR Big Band**

By [Jack Bowers](#)



Toronto Jazz Orchestra

Under a Tree

[TJO](#)

2010

The admirable Toronto Jazz Orchestra has released three albums to date, the most recent *The Path* in 2009 and *Under a Tree* six years earlier. As was noted in reviewing *The Path* [January 2010], the TJO is good, really good; and it can swing, really swing. While there are of course dissimilar charts on *Under a Tree*, everything else applies. The ensemble is razor-sharp, individually and collectively. To put it another way, everyone is in sync, in tune and on the same page. A seasoned orchestra, no doubt about that.

Eight of the album's 10 selections were recorded live in May 2003 at the Pilot Tavern in Toronto, and half were written by members of the orchestra including conductor Josh Grossman's jaunty "Together at Last," a clever variation on the standard "Alone Together." Bassist [Mike Smith](#) wrote "Alicante," pianist Laila Biali the turbulent "From Everlasting to Everlasting" (on which she also solos), bass trombonist [Chris Hunt](#) "First X's Free," guitarist Todd Elsliger the sensuous "Kissing." The groovy title song, which vaguely echoes [Thad Jones'](#) "Kids Are Pretty People," was composed by Canadian legend [Phil Nimmons](#), "Reverence" by Paul Ashwell, "In Place" by Dafydd Hughes, "The Far Side" by Greg Bush, the raucous, Mingus-inspired "Return of the Shuffleupagus" by [Andrew Jones](#).

Although the ensemble, as noted, is alert and focused, the solos are of a more variable nature. Most are suitable but few rise far above the norm. Pianist Erin Gray is respectable on "Reverence," as are trumpeter Will Loach and alto Gareth Lewis on "Under a Tree," Gray and soprano Mark Laver on "Alicante," tenor Jonathan Kay on "Together at Last," Kay and bassist Smith on "In Place," Laver and trombonist R.J. Satchithanathan on "First X's," guitarist Elsliger on "Kissing," Grossman on "The Far Side," tenor Chris Hunsburger and trombonist Joel Green on "Shuffleupagus." Even so, the orchestra's primary strength lies in its unflagging togetherness. For an explicit example, try "The Far Side," which opens and closes with hair-raising *a cappella* chorales by the brass; the surging unison passages in "Shuffleupagus," or the trim ensemble work that brightens every other tune.

While *Under a Tree* predates the TJO's most recent recording by half a dozen years, there's no appreciable imbalance in quality between the two, even though most of this one was recorded in concert, the other in a studio. In each case, the TJO affirms its stature as a world-class orchestra that is worthy of appraisal and respect.