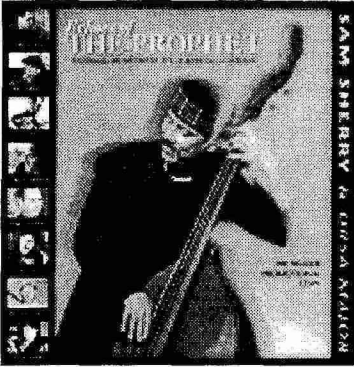


## FOUR AND SIX STRING LOCALS

We Mainers like to take our pleasures with no strings attached. But we'll make exceptions when the strings lead up the necks of finely tuned instruments. Before I stick my writerly neck out any further, let me say that I want to talk about two new discs by local artists who pluck, bow and strum strings with fingers full of magic.



Bassist **Sam Sherry** is a regular on the regional scene who occasionally puts out a disc with his group **Ursa Major**. His *We'll See* from 2000 has long been one of my favorite albums. So, I was happy to hear that he had a new one coming out this year. *Echoes of the Prophet* turns out to be another gem marked by musical and poetic depth.

The poetic element comes courtesy of Kahlil Gibran, an author in whose work many find words to live by. Sherry has selected passages from Gibran's *The Prophet* and matched them to music that both frames and, in an abstract way but melodious way, reinvents them.

Sherry places the words in the mouth of vocalist **Chris Humphrey**, who knows how to stretch and bend his vocal chords in line with the dictates of post-bop jazz. Kurt Elling comes to mind, stylistically, but Humphrey's got his own sound and he nicely brings the lofty words of Gibran down to earth.

The instrumental element of the music is ably handled by a crew that

prominently features **Billy Pierce** on sax. A former Jazz Messenger, Pierce takes a number of solos that elevate the music as much as do the words. I particularly like his work on "This Message Is For You," a swinging instrumental that opens up the disc at about mid-point.

**Scott Reeves**, whose trombone and distinctive alto-flugelhorn add another whole dimension to this disc, is also solid on this piece that has that sort of hip swagger of a classic tune by Charles Mingus (another bassist who sometimes worked with poetic texts).

Guitarist **Mark Kleinhaut** quickens the pace on the fragmentary "You Talk" and solos inventively in trio with the leader and drummer **Billy Arnold** on the samba-like "Fun Is Good" (love that title).

I've listened to this disc about half a dozen times now and still feel that I've only scratched the surface (not literally, I hope). But, I've heard enough to know that it's a major statement that borrows from a literary master and takes his words and us all to another level.

These two discs reveal a new maturity in the work of progressive artists who don't let their strings tie them down.

- Steve Feeney