

# **KING JAMES & THE SERFS OF SWING**

## **"Introducing . . . King James & the Serfs of Swing"**

### **Independent**

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Though this collection of swing-era anthems and recently minted jazz pieces with a similar slant features a veritable faculty of Washington-based jazz musicians and educators, including King James himself (aka James Levy), school's out and the dance is on.

The rotating cast of players celebrates the overlapping legacies of Duke Ellington, Count Basie and the Gershwins with verve and affection, thanks in part to singers Dave Shapanka, Juleen Stacey and Sharon Clark. The ensemble adds a few original tunes that showcase gifted soloists, including alto saxophonist Peter Fraize, trumpeter Marc Weigel and young Turk-trombonist Matt Musselman, and manages to colorfully reconfigure the Grateful Dead's deathless "Truckin' " to suit its own swinging purposes. Oh, and there's more than a hint of vintage jive here, too, courtesy of Levy's walls-come-tumblin'-down arrangement of "Joshua," to say nothing of the spiritual glow radiating from Clark's performance of "Swing Low." As for Levy's anti-Bush administration reworking of "Mack the Knife," no one will ever accuse him of pandering to both sides of the aisle just to keep the band booked.

Early on, though, Clark helps underscore the ensemble's raison d'etre, via a scat-laced arrangement of "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)," and nothing dampens the spirit for long.

**-- Mike Joyce**

*Appearing Tuesday at Blues Alley.*