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## Common Men

The Brian Pastor Big Band | BPO Music

By [Jack Bowers](#)

Yes, I'll admit I'm growing old (the senior discount is now a given), but never too old, I hope, to appreciate a big band that's clearly bursting with energy and enthusiasm and swings like every note may be its last. By the way, that's a thumbnail sketch of trombonist Brian Pastor's Philadelphia-based ensemble and *Common Men*, a dynamic and unequivocally dazzling debut that has left me grinning from ear to ear.

Any session that opens with a pulse-quickening arrangement of a Cole Porter classic is definitely "All Right with Me." As it turns out, that's only the prelude to a succession of superlative charts by Pastor, Kaj Hansen, Chuck Gottesman, Jeff Darrohn, Paul Morris and tenor saxophonist Andrew Neu, who not only revised the Porter standard but cooked up a mouth-watering "Midnight Buffet" and constructed a sturdy "Seven Mile Bridge."

Besides playing marvelous trombone, Pastor wrote the groovy "T.S.C. Blues or a Night at the Rat" and amorous "Ballad for Ben" (featuring Gottesman's flugelhorn) and cleverly arranged Max Bennett's funky "L.A. Expression," the Gershwin brothers' "A Foggy Day," Jule Styne's "Make Someone Happy," the fast-moving "Son of Feelings" (another of the album's many highlights) and Aaron Copland's monumental "Fanfare for the Common Man" (from which the album's title is derived). High marks too for spelling Copland's name right.



**Track Listing:** It's All Right with Me; T.S.C. Blues or a Night at the Rat; Fanfare for the Common Man; You Don't Know What Love Is; Little Henry; L.A. Expression; Ballad for Ben; Midnight Buffet; Son of Feelings; A Foggy Day; Isle of the Pale Eye; My Hard Luck Story; Seven Mile Bridge; Make Someone Happy (71:04).

**Personnel:** Brian Pastor: leader, trombone; Rick Gazda, Tony Bonsera, Chuck Gottesman, Kevin Rodgers, Peter Neu: trumpet; Kaj Hansen, Bob Apgar: alto sax, flute; Andrew Neu: tenor sax, flute; Ed Etkins: tenor sax, flute, alto flute; Alan Kirschner: baritone sax, bass clarinet, flute; Jay Shanman, Glenn Dodson, Paul Morris: trombone; Mike Purdy: bass trombone; Dave Kenney: piano; Greg Kettinger: guitar; Rob Cochran: bass; Tony Vigilante: drums; Grant Garfuss: vocal (14).

Rounding out the engaging program are Darrohn's breezy "Little Henry," saxophonist Hansen's glistening "Isle of the Pale Eye," Gottesman's riveting "Hard Luck Story" (based on "Bye Bye Blackbird") and trombonist Morris's lustrous arrangement of "You Don't Know What Love Is," on which Pastor is the lone soloist (as he is on "Feelings"). There's one vocal, by Grant Garfuss on "Make Someone Happy," which is followed by Pastor's leisurely a cappella salute to the dispossessed "Bill Bailey" and a final "I love you, dad," which closes the album.

Having mentioned Pastor and Gottesman, it should be noted that the other soloists are equally sharp and impressive. They include alto/flutist Hansen, trumpeter Rick Gazda, brothers Andrew (tenor sax) and Peter Neu (trumpet), pianist David Kenney, tenor Ed Etkins, bassist Rob Cochran and drummer Tony Vigilante. If the purpose is to swing, it's almost impossible to do otherwise with Vigilante steering the craft and dropping the bombs, a service he also performs for Philly's Al/Craig Raymond Big Band. If Vigilante is not the most talented big-band drummer on the scene today, he's at least a finalist for that honor.

Don't let the name mislead you; these are by no means "common men," nor is this your run-of-the-mill big-band album. It's a humdinger, and the real surprise would be if it didn't appear on many reviewers' year-end top ten lists.