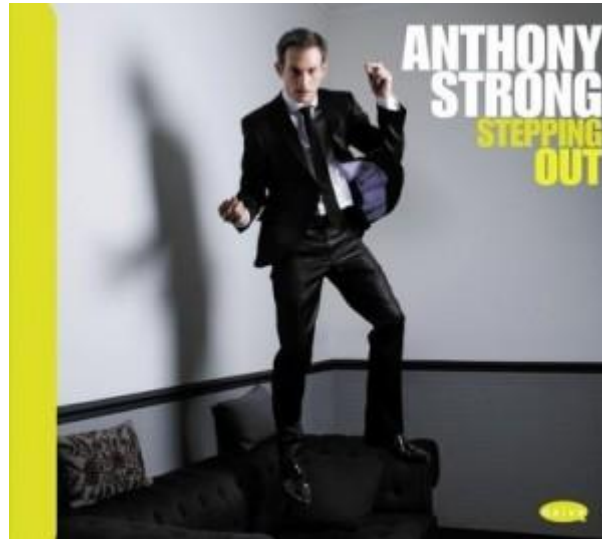


Anthony Strong – Stepping Out



As Jamie Cullum inches ever closer to pop's mainstream and Michael Bublé trades up to bigger and bigger showings of bombast, along comes pianist and vocalist Anthony Strong, a ball of energy who seems to combine the best of both. Already touted as the next big thing in his native England, the one-time session player struck out on his own in 2009, soon after delivering a self-produced debut album of original material and a chart-topping EP of mostly Tin Pan Alley tunes.

Now signed to the Parisian naïve label, Strong splits the difference, marrying nine jazz and pop standards to five originals. He blasts out of the gate with a blistering "Too Darn Hot" strongly suggestive of the pounding swing that set Cullum on the path to stardom. The breakneck pace continues through the clever "Change My Ways," a decidedly Cullum-esque slice of romantic fervor, and a heavily caffeinated "Luck Be a Lady." Strong finally slows to midtempo, entering Bublé territory for a nice, loose "Stepping Out With My Baby" and a breezy lope through Bert Kaempfert's "L-O-V-E."

His swirling "Falling in Love" and faux-noir "Someone Knows" venture dangerously close to Bublé's brand of saturated overproduction, but Strong rights those wrongs with the peppy "Earlybird" and wistful "Learning to Unlove You." In between, a mix of covers, extending from a youthfully tender "My Foolish Heart" and winged "Overjoyed"