

# VIRGINIA MAYHEW

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## *WHAT THE CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT VIRGINIA MAYHEW*

### **A Simple Thank You (2007)**

"Thank You Uncle Edward" and "A Simple Thank You" . . . are both gems . . . with fantastic musicianship . . . wonderful arrangements . . . and great style. Kudos to all concerned!

**Bob Collins, WRHU**

A SIMPLE THANK YOU for making such a hip record. It'll be on the air at 'BGO in the next couple of days.

I'm going to hum the parking fairy song next time I need a space. Thanks for the tip.

Best,

**Gary Walker, WBGO Jazz 88**

### **Sandan Shuffle (2006)**

"Who's this Virginia Mayhew woman anyway, Dexter Gordon's daughter? Sonny Rollin's niece? She plays the saxophone like a blood relative of those two giants..."

**Dan McClenaghan, ALL ABOUT JAZZ**

"The exciting music on Sandan Shuffle is turned around and played with a loquacious spirit, swinging with a delightful sensibility and even shuffling...Mayhew blows with controlled abandon."

**Jerry D'Sousa, ALL ABOUT JAZZ**

"..refinement as well as force, contemplation and grace as well as power - all qualities evident in Mayhew's playing. Generations of reed players can be sensed and heard in her work...she has welded her influences into a singular style: plaintive on ballads, assertive on Blues."

**Michael Steinman, CADENCE**

"Inspired zigzag is a forte; she gets more compelling with each new disc."

**Jim Macnie, VILLAGE VOICE**

"It is obvious that Mayhew is equally comfortable with tunes in four as well as tunes in other meters, as she has an effortless approach in maintaining a melodic flow in her improvisations regardless of the beat structure."

**Frank Bongiorno, SAXOPHONE JOURNAL**

"...one of the top jazz artists of her generation. Her voice on tenor and soprano reflects melodic strength and beauty, harmonic boldness and rhythmic surety, all part and parcel of a distinctive individuality."

**ACCENT ON TAMPA BAY**

"Melodious, R&B-soaked saxophonist..."

**JAZZWISE**

"Convention bores Virginia Mayhew, so it's no surprise that Sandan Shuffle doesn't merely embrace the unconventional, but seizes it in a bear hug...(her) tone is gorgeous and ...impeccable phrasing...robustness and confidence."

**Terrell Kent Holmes, ALL ABOUT JAZZ**

"...musical masterpiece...Awesome album!"

**Bob Morello, FACTS ON WAX**

"The lady has a sound from deep in the tough tenor firmament. The album has a lot of odd time signature performances, and Mayhew and company make them feel as natural as your universal four-four beat."

**Owen Cordle, THE NEWS & OBSERVER**

"Mayhew, of course, stands out on both tenor and soprano while continuing to expand her talents as a composer and arranger."

**James Dewey Davis, JAZZREVIEWS.COM**

"Mayhew shows mettle and exudes confidence, as she possesses an easy attack without reed-chomping. A sweet tone, moderate volume and lack of bluster and stridency...pays particular attention to melody."

**Fred Bouchard, DOWNBEAT**

"...Saxophonist Mayhew's material and playing are strong, here solos agile, and the tight band has a confident sound and vibe."

**Elzy Kolb JAZZIZ Magazine**

"She can execute the chord changes and do all the other standard things expected of jazz saxophonists, but she's more concerned with mood and feel than technique, and doesn't feel obligated to overly demonstrate that facility."

**Ron Wynn, RIFFS Nashville City Paper**

"...this album underscores her claim that the discipline (karate) has musical benefits..."

**JAZZIZ Magazine**

"Throughout, Mayhew is expansive on tenor and ...impressive in her vibrato-less use of the soprano saxophone." **Doug Ramsey, RIFFTIDES**

"...the extra beats sound utterly natural, even adding a bit of special interest to standards like "Tenderly" and "Let's Fall In Love."

**David Franklin, JAZZTIMES**

"...a straight-ahead approach, releasing emotional fire along the way and having a good time, too. She swings." **Jim Santella, ALL ABOUT JAZZ**

"She's got a confident style rooted in hard-bop, and her fresh ideas rely less on flash than on clean, precise artistry."

**PRIMETIME**

"She plays her sax as well as anyone, man or woman...Mayhew swings hard and shows her versatility on bop blues and ballads."

**D. Oscar Grooms, O's PLACE**

"She can take care of business with a black belt's disciplined force and grace...molten sound...throbbing lyricism."

**INDYSTAR.COM**

"A delightful 10-tune package...they sound like they've been together for a long time...Ms. Mayhew's solos are also terrific."

**John Patten, JAZZIMPROV'S NEW YORK JAZZ GUIDE**

"4 1/2 stars...Superb blowing by the leader...Her interpretations of standards and jazz classics also merit strong praise...highly recommended."

**Ken Dryden, ALL MUSIC GUIDE**

"...on her excellent new CD...shows off her sinewy, no-nonsense tenor..."

**Jill McManus, STAR LEDGER**

"Mayhew, of course, stands out on both tenor and soprano while continuing to expand her talents as a composer and arranger."

**James Dewey Davis, JAZZREVIEWS.COM Critics Pick Best CDs of 2006**

Convention bores Virginia Mayhew. So it's no surprise that Sandan Shuffle, her fourth release as a leader, doesn't merely embrace the unconventional, but seizes it in a bear hug.

Right at the top, the blues-inspired title track is played seven to the bar, not eight and Mayhew's tenor grooves like mad. Her sax smiles throughout an inventive Calypso arrangement of "Let's Fall In Love," with Kenny Wessel laying down cool guitar lines. Bassist Harvie S contributes the song "Now I Know," a ballad in the fine tradition of the Charlie Haden Quartet, and Mayhew wraps her deep tone dreamily around the melody. Mayhew's fluid soprano works in fine tandem with Wessel's chops on "Spring Is Not Here"; she brightens up the melody as though she's glad spring hasn't arrived! "Jazz-like" opens with a Sam Spade type of theme with Mayhew's muscular tenor setting the pace.

The wonderful "I Thought You Loved Me" shows Mayhew's touch at composing a ballad. The song brings Coltrane's "Acknowledgement" to mind, with its opening tenor statement, pizzicato bridge and extended statement by Mayhew. The band completely funks up Monk's "In Walked Bud," maintaining the original 4/4 meter but giving it an R and B character, thanks to Victor Jones' downright nasty drumming.

Mayhew's tone is gorgeous on her 5/4 arrangement of "Tenderly" and Wessel extracts lovely nuggets from the nooks and crannies of the melody. Mayhew's sad intonation and impeccable phrasing on the soprano underscore the false bravado of "I Can Get Along Without You Very Well," and she reprises her "Monterey Blues," featured on Phantoms (2003), with Wessel's guitar giving it a different flavor and character. Mayhew plays with robustness and confidence - she's always sounded good, but on Sandan Shuffle she's never sounded better.

**Terrell Kent Holmes, All About Jazz**

"The late martial arts legend, Bruce Lee, once said that knowledge in his sport meant self-knowledge. "A martial artist has to take responsibility for himself and accept the consequences of his own doing." For saxophonist Virginia Mayhew, she's learned that lesson very well.

"A native of San Francisco, Mayhew, who has been a part of the New York jazz scene since moving there two decades ago, has made a name for herself playing alongside legends such as Cab Calloway, Joe Williams and James Brown. At the same time, she has also been practicing karate and after 18 years, achieved the sandan level, meaning she is now a third-degree black belt.

"It may be unusual to bring martial arts into a music review, but when an artist like Mayhew adapts karate as a metaphor for her growth as a musician, it can make for some interesting results. Sandan Shuffle, her fourth recording as a leader, continues a journey that has lasted more than 20 years. Her backup band serves as a strong supporting unit that's very evident on this recording. Mayhew, of course, stands out on both tenor and soprano while continuing to expand her talents as a composer and arranger.

"The ten tracks featured serves Mayhew in a free post-bop style. The title track, commemorating her reaching the sandan level, is a shuffle blues tune that kicks into high gear with her sly, clear playing and commends loudly along with drummer Victor Harvey's crawling beats. Bouncy tunes such as "Spring Is Not Here" and "I Thought You Loved Me" highlight Mayhew's strength as a composer and how a diverse group of musicians really enjoy playing together. "Now I Know" complements her on this sweet ballad written by Harvie S. The entire band blends rhythmically on "Jazz-Like," an upbeat ballad in a slow 3/4 time. Jones changes the tempo at various times while guitarist, Kenny Wessel, delivers a moody solo reminiscent of Walter Becker's Djangosque style of playing.

"On Hoagy Carmichael's "I Get Along Without You Very Well," Mayhew's solo soars clean as she and her band come close to matching the poignancy of a song that was to be one of Billie Holliday's last recordings. The last track on the CD was "Monterey Blues," a self-written ode to her native city, that was already featured on her previous release, Phantoms. This version is more upbeat and features Wessel's hard-edged contribution on guitar.

"With this latest release, Virginia Mayhew's journey of self-knowledge through jazz and karate, thankfully, is far from over. As long as she gains more black belts with her hobby, Mayhew has proven that like Wayne Shorter and Branford Marsalis, she's on her way to earning a different kind of black belt as a top-notch saxophonist."

**James Dewey Davis, [jazzreview.com](http://jazzreview.com)**

I had a chance to see Virginia Mayhew a few years ago in a sideman gig where she appeared as part of an all-femme quintet backing a singer. From memory, the other musicians were Allison Miller, Kendra Shank and Roberta Pickett. My recollection of Mayhew's performance was that she was clearly the most pressing reason to be there. She displayed strong and melodic playing on tenor sax, plus a few numbers on soprano sax. There was nothing tentative about Mayhew's presentation; a sure-footed style cast her into a field of many better-known saxophonists. She also performed "Montererey Blues," a piece that's included on this album.

Virginia Mayhew's fifth album features a new group and a change of pace for the saxophonist. The cover photo and liners draw similarities between her training and discipline in karate and music. Mayhew is a third-level black belt (Sandán) and named the title composition to reflect this ("Sandán Shuffle"). Mayhew is a transplanted San Franciscan who has been active and living in New York since 1987 as both a leader and sideman.

Mayhew's quartet is a piano-less one, with guitarist Kenny Wessel, veteran bassist Harvie S and drummer Victor "Yahya" Jones. The songs and set list make a varied and interesting combination. While "Sandán Shuffle" has a quirky hard bop feel and fully establishes Mayhew's chops on tenor sax, the following Arlen/Kohler piece "Let's Fall In Love" is reinvented in an attractive calypso/cha cha mode (calling Sonny Rollins West Indian fans!) that I found to be irresistible. Kenny Wessel's guitar is right down the middle on these tracks, with good mainstream solos and comping. Mayhew picks up the soprano sax on "Spring Is Not Here" and the Sinatra-associated ballad "I Get Along Without You Very Well," and she has a delivery that wants to make you here more of it.

On "Jazz-like," Wessel adapts a harder edge (à la Rosenwinkel or Scofield) to match Mayhew's tenor sax. The group adapts the Thelonious Monk classic "In Walked Bud" into a post-Millennium funk groove, with Jones playing a backbeat...

All in all, Sandán Shuffle is stimulating and a pleasure to hear.

**Michael P. Gladstone, All About Jazz**

"Who's this Virginia Mayhew woman anyway, Dexter Gordon's daughter? Sonny Rollins' niece? She plays the saxophone like a blood relative of those two giants on Sandán Shuffle. Actually, we know the reedist well from her standout 2003 effort, *Phantoms*, as an artist who has embraced the mainstream mode and ridden it with vigor and supreme assurance into the top level of straightahead saxophonists.

"Since Dexter Gordon's name came up, Mayhew opens the disc with the original title tune, which features her tenor sax sounding strong and loose and relaxed, Gordon-like, over a bouncing rhythm. This good-time composition is about as danceable and engaging as a piece of music can get.

"And since Sonny Rollins' name came up, track two, the classic Harold Arlen gem "Let's Fall in Love," goes into a Rollins-esque calypso/cha cha groove, with Mayhew's tone blowing hearty and robust, and first-call bassist Harvie S sounding especially elastic in the rhythm.

"Mayhew wrote four of these tunes, revisiting her classic "Monterey Blues" from Phantoms. Two more numbers were penned by bassist Harvie S; and the group takes on Monk with an especially fine, funky and loose-limbed rendition of "In Walked Bud." The saxophonist breaks out the soprano horn on Hoagy Carmichael's "I Get Along Without You Very Well" and on Mayhew's own classic-sounding "Spring is Not Here."

"With 2003's Phantoms, Virginia Mayhew claimed a spot on the top level of jazz saxophonists. Sandan Shuffle backs that claim up."

**Dan McClenaghan, All About Jazz**

"Virginia Mayhew has a third degree black belt in karate, a level known as sandan. Thus the title of her newest release. The exciting music on Sandan Shuffle is turned around and played with a loquacious spirit, swinging with a delightful sensibility and even shuffling.

"Mayhew's tone is deep, dark and flinty. Even as she carves a burnished edge, she pours warmth and emotion into the music. She has a sense of fun too, and she wastes no time in getting that detail into the open. Enter "Sandan Shuffle." The melody grabs the ear, and when Mayhew embarks on her voyage, she makes sure the lure stays. Her tenor romps along and she continues to burn attractive vignettes into the groove before yielding the spotlight to Kenny Wessel. The lyrical guitarist, his phrasing precise and dripping with musicality, adds a captivating voice.

"Mayhew lends a stellar presence on "I Get Along Without You Very Well," capturing the ache and pain in her heartfelt soprano saxophone playing. She added "In Walked Bud" because there was room on the CD, which was a wise decision. Mayhew blows with controlled abandon. Drummer Victor Jones wraps the piece's momentum in a bevy of colourful splashes; its most energetic moments come when Wessel takes the helm and Harvie S and Jones drive the pace."

**Jerry D'Souza, All About Jazz**

"Karate requires discipline and hard work. So does effective musicianship.

"Most of the martial arts require fast, aggressive motions that are accompanied by slower, more controlled moves. Sometimes, the hand must stop at precisely the right place or someone will get hurt. This requires constant practice.

"So does playing the saxophone. And Virginia Mayhew does that very well. She also has a third degree black belt in karate (sandán). Her study of the martial arts and her study of the saxophone go hand in hand, in both areas, she learns to control her mind and body in order to achieve a goal. She works with others in complete harmony and puts in many hours of practice in order to get it right. Her working partners are required to put as much effort into their study as she does in her own.

"Mayhew and her quartet interpret standards and originals on Sandán Shuffle with a straightahead approach, releasing emotional fire along the way and having a good time, too. She swings. Guitarist Kenny Wessel, bassist Harvie S and drummer Victor Jones ensure that the motion surrounding her falls into compliance. The blues runs through their performance, evoking deep feelings throughout. Mayhew's muscular tenor tone portrays the kind of confidence that says, "Yeah." She pushes hard with a powerful stream that walks the walk and talks the talk."

**Jim Santella, All About Jazz**

"Tenderly" and "Monterey Blues" reveal a deep passion, while "In Walked Bud" and "Sandán Shuffle" exhibit the cocky kind of strut that has always made straightahead jazz strong. Like her applications in the study of karate, Mayhew has poured both power and finesse into her musical program, finding a proper balance. And that earns a third degree black belt for this highly recommended album. "

"I don't know if it's the innate 'nurturing' qualities of the feminine mystique, but one is musically 'sustained' by the art contained within this new project, as well as the true colossal talents in the guise of reed-person extraordinaire Virginia Mayhew. We are nourished by her creativity and bold raw gift(s). Her bebop is free, sometimes abstract in a positive way, and seems to reflect several assertive areas of our beloved musical traditions. Her solo on 'I Get Along Without You Very Well' was both supreme and original....Her horn lines bringing out the best in her inventive playing style."

**George W. Carroll, The Musicians' Ombudsman**

## **PHANTOMS – 2003**

“Virginia Mayhew is a master of her arts.”

**Jamila Bey, JAZZTIMES**

“...a great artist who refuses to stand still. This is the work of a great musician.”

**Tim Price, Saxophone Journal**

“A Five-star masterwork...Phantoms is the most impressive recording of the year for these ears. It is as joyful as it is stimulating.

This is a classic jazz recording that I strongly recommend.”

**Mark E. Gallo, jazzreview .com**

### **Best Ten New Releases...2003**

“Virginia Mayhew, Phantoms...a very creative tenor and soprano saxophonist”.

**W. Royal Stokes, jazzhouse.org/bulletin**

“Phantoms is indispensable”

**Beatrice S. Richardson, jazzreview.com**

“The accomplished tenor saxophonist returns with her admirable long-term quartet...

...going inside and outside with ease and imagination”

**Gary Giddins, VILLAGE VOICE**

“Phantoms is a supreme artistic achievement”

**John Doll, JazzReview.com**

“A top shelf, must have CD”

**Terrell Holmes, All About Jazz (NYC)**

“Mayhew has established herself at the forefront of tenor/soprano saxophonists and composers, resting on the edge of greatness. This band produces some of the most memorable contemporary post bop in recent memory.”

**C. Michael Bailey, allaboutjazz.com**

“Phantoms has the intricate weave that comes from a band that has worked together...

A breakout effort by Virginia Mayhew”

**Dan McClenaghan**

“Excellent group interaction and ...strong imaginative solo playing.”

**Paul Donnelly, ejazznews.com**

“Mayhew’s composing and playing have gotten better with each of her releases and Phantoms sounds better on each listen.”

**Alan Lankin, jazzmatazz**

“...inventive tenor playing..”

**Paul Donnelly, ejazznews.com**

### **NO WALLS – 2000**

(was chosen one of the Top Ten CDs of the Year by  
**JAZZIZ MAGAZINE and CADENCE MAGAZINE)**

“Virginia Mayhew has a tenor saxophone sound so big that it had me wondering if she was born in Texas. But there’s a New York sophistication to that Texas Tenor demeanor, that allows for all sorts of subtleties...

...No Walls is a fabulous gem of an album.”

**Larry Nai, JAZZ REVIEW.COM**

“A real breakthrough for her as a leader and saxophonist...Virginia Mayhew has developed a compelling edge of her own and her steady time sees her through the risks that make a jazz solo worth following.”

**Gary Giddins, VILLAGE VOICE**

“...my favorite disc of the young century...Get this one now, you can thank me later.”

**Neil Tesser, JAZZIZ**

“A full tone, poised and soulful.”

**Mike Joyce, WASHINGTON POST**

“A musician’s musician, Virginia Mayhew is capable of many roles...in terms of straight-ahead tenor blowing, this is about as good as it gets.”

**Tim Price, SAXOPHONE JOURNAL**

“...unabashedly warm tone and an expressive gift for melodic invention... confident, even aggressively muscular, tenor saxophone playing, delivered with a powerful rhythmic drive and first-rate technical facility”

**Don Heckman, L.A. TIMES**

“...Might very well be one of the future greats of the tenor...”

**Scott Yanow, L.A. Jazz Scene**

“...showcases her impressive skills as a composer and her lustrous, rounded sound on tenor.”

**Andrew Gilbert, San Jose Mercury News**

“The horns – and Mayhew’s fine compositions in a full range of bop idioms - are the stars of this session, and they sparkle throughout.”

**Greg Robinson, JAZZTIMES**

“Virginia Mayhew and Ingrid Jensen bring fresh light to a traditional format... her veteran tenor sound, rich in overtones, offers a lyrical approach suited for the modern mainstream.”

**Jim Santella, CADENCE MAGAZINE**

“We are listening to not only a very gifted musician but also a superb writer...as a musician, bandleader and composer there is a lot of originality to Virginia Mayhew...a lot of substance and energy to her music...Virginia is a jazz force...”

**Peter La Barbara, THE JAZZ ZINE**

“No Walls is notable on several levels: its high degree of musicianship, the success of Mayhew’s compositions, and its sense of fun”

**Bill Donaldson, JAZZ IMPROV**

"One of the outstanding acts was New York's Virginia Mayhew Quartet. Playing a mixture of originals and standards, and led by Mayhew's robust and rich tenor saxophone tone, the Quartet's sound was a fabulous mix of versatility and originality."

**Richard John, The Australian**

“...her tenor tone ...(is) attractive, compelling and full of energy and life. In addition Mayhew is an articulate composer; her music makes wonderful melodic, harmonic and common sense.

**J. Robert Brangonier, 52nd STREET.COM**

“With No Walls, Mayhew proves again that as a performer, composer and band leader, she’s approaching the upper echelon of jazz artists. Well worth checking out.”

**Joel Roberts, ALLABOUTJAZZ.COM**

“Simply the best straight-ahead jazz combo I’ve heard since the ‘60s”

Allen McQuaid, FRESHMAN FANS WORLDWIDE

“While some compare her sound to Dexter Gordon’s, she has a sound of her own. She can be calm and lyrical on the ballads; she can also shake the place up...”

**Joe Luciano, THE GREEN MOUNTAIN JAZZ MESSENGER**

“Mayhew’s style is robust, with both a rich tone and a no-nonsense approach... straight-ahead and boppish.”

**STEREO REVIEW**

“A first rate record...wholeheartedly recommended. Mayhew is a composer of distinct promise...of wit, flair and considerable range.”

**Scott Yanow, L.A. JAZZ SCENE**

“Mayhew’s playing is like a polished stone, gorgeous and colorful. Never slick and vacuous.”

**John Doll, JAZZ REVIEW**

“An exemplary recording of post-1950’s jazz, made anew for the millennium... every note has a freshness and an allure that shows that looking backward can generate something new.”

**Jules Epstein, JAZZMATAZZ**

“...An auspicious sophomore release, which captures (her) sheer vitality... while also showcasing her wares as a writer.”

James Lamperta, THE SARATOGIAN

“Virginia Mayhew’s new album, No Walls, should establish her once and for all.”

**S.D. Feeney, FACE MAGAZINE**

“...strong, touching and inspiring...explodes with musical intensity and beauty...  
...a great composer, saxophonist and bandleader..”

**Tim Price, SAXOPHONE JOURNAL**

“Swinging...a solid mainstreamer whose tenor sound  
recalls Dexter Gordon’s big tone.”

**Dave Burns, JAZZTIMES**

## **NINI GREEN – 1996**

“Four Stars...a fresh, intelligent, polished player...Virginia Mayhew, remember  
her name.”

**downbeat magazine**

“A highly auspicious debut.....imaginative mainstream playing on both alto and  
tenor saxophones... Her compositions are notable for their melodies. She is well  
worth hearing.”

**David Griffiths, South Wales Evening Post**

“Mayhew shows mastery of all her horns, and of the idiom...an impressive  
debut.”

**David Dupo, CADENCE MAGAZINE**

“The sophistication of the material, the high level of execution, lack of  
predictability in the solos, and the company Mayhew keeps...make this an  
exceptional first album.”

**Kirk Silsbee, JAZZIZ**

“Mayhew has an appealingly fluid tone that drifted in legato lines over the ballads  
and rode snappily aboard the more upbeat, Latin-tinged numbers.”

**Jessica Nicholas, THE AGE (AUSTRALIA)**

Virginia Mayhew can do it all – swing, soar, bop, arrange, compose, improvise,  
and free-form.”

**Jack Burke, WAXWORKS**