

Saxman Lamb comes out like a lion

From the time he began making a name for himself in the Portland music scene more than a decade ago, saxophonist Patrick Lamb — just out of Oregon Episcopal School, fresh-faced, earnest and ambitious — has explored a variety of styles. He's worked on his straight-ahead jazz chops in quintets, jam sessions and the like. He's worked with contemporary jazz star Tom Grant and veteran bluesman Norman Sylvester. He's sung R&B.

The main direction of his career, though, has been toward smooth

jazz, which not only holds the best commercial prospects for a contemporary saxophonist but fits with Lamb's crowd-pleaser musical personality. But that genre never seemed to spur Lamb to develop his artistic voice beyond the polishing of surfaces; even his gutsiest blowing could come across as facile (as evidenced on "The Closer I Get," his album from about a year ago).

But now out comes "Sunshine Alley," a bright, welcome sign that Lamb's decade of hard work and eclecticism have really paid off.

CRITIC'S CHOICE

Taking on the time-honored tradition of the organ trio, Lamb teams up with Hammond B3 player Louis Pain, best-known for his work with Paul deLay's great blues band, and completes the circle alternately with Mel Brown or Jason Carter on drums. Steeped in the soul-jazz approach of the 1960s, this is music that proves you can be direct and accessible without ingratiating your way toward the lowest common denominator. And it takes advantage of the tonal warmth and openhearted phrasing at the same time that it pushes Lamb to dig a little deeper for the



Portland saxophonist Patrick Lamb finds an old-school soul groove on "Sunshine Alley."

authentic expression.

Friday's shows to mark the album's release should be a ray of sunshine for the soul.

7:30 and 10 p.m. Friday, Jimmy

Mak's, 300 N.W. 10th Ave.; \$10 at the door. Reservations: 503-295-6542.

—Marty Hughley