

BASSIST STANLEY CLARKE RECORDS FIRST ACOUSTIC JAZZ TRIO ALBUM FEATURING HIROMI AND LENNY WHITE

***Jazz In The Garden* Due At Retail on May 12, 2009**

In a career that spans nearly four decades and includes gigs with Return to Forever, Rite of Strings and a variety of other solo and collaborative projects along the way, bassist Stanley Clarke – one of the most prominent voices in electric jazz and fusion – had seemingly covered every possible corner of the jazz landscape. But there was one avenue he had yet to explore.

“I had never done an acoustic bass record, ever,” he says. “There’s a long list of people on whose records I’ve played acoustic bass – Art Blakey, Dexter Gordon, Stan Getz, Joe Henderson and many others – but I’d never done an acoustic jazz trio record of my own. So I wanted to record one that would just feature the piano and the acoustic bass in a way that you could really hear the bass.”

This long-overdue dream project becomes a reality with the May 12, 2009, worldwide release of *Jazz In The Garden* (HUCD 3155) on Heads Up International, a division of Concord Music Group. For his first straightahead acoustic jazz trio recording, Clarke assembles two brilliant collaborators at the top of their respective games: pianist Hiromi Uehara and drummer Lenny White. Each represents a distinctly different generational and cultural perspective, but given the range and versatility of both, the net effect is superb. Indeed, the synergy resulting from all three of these luminaries makes for one of the most refreshing Stanley Clarke recordings in recent years.

“Lenny is like a walking encyclopedia of jazz history,” says Clarke, who first played with White in Joe Henderson’s band when both session men were barely out of their teens, and later in the fusion-oriented Return To Forever. “Lenny is the guy who will never let you forget tradition, ever. When it comes to drummers, it’s fashionable to think that the one who plays the fastest or has the most gear is the best guy. But the guy you really want is the guy who’s smart – the guy who really has a lot upstairs. That’s Lenny.”

White likens his relationship with Clarke to some of the great pairings in sports. “In football, there was Joe Montana and Jerry Rice in San Francisco,” he says. “In baseball, there was Tom Seaver and Jerry Grote with the Mets. These were some very successful combinations. And then in jazz, you have some great pairings of drummers and bass players like Tony Williams and Ron Carter, or Elvin Jones and Jimmy Garrison. I rank Stanley and myself among those pairings. We’ve played together for so long, in so many different kinds of situations. We started out by playing straightahead music together, and then that morphed into the jazz-rock fusion, which became a movement in itself. Now we’re coming back full-circle with this recording.”

Clarke was less familiar with Hiromi, a Berklee-trained protégé of Ahmad Jamal and Chick Corea who made her recording debut only six years ago. Since then, she has shaken up the piano jazz scene with a riveting style that ranges from the traditional to the avant garde. “I checked her out, and I realized that she was really, really talented,” says Clarke. “To be so young, and yet have so much knowledge – about melody, about harmony, about rhythm – is very rare. It’s very unusual for a piano player under the age of thirty to have that kind of maturity. That’s what’s cool about her.”

To date, Hiromi has committed much of her compositional and performance energies toward pushing the music to the outside, but she welcomed the opportunity to do something a little more traditional. “I’ve always loved straightahead jazz,” she says. “I’d just never done it in my own projects. So I was very happy to be able to do it finally. And to do it with these two musicians was more than I could have hoped for. I didn’t feel any walls. They were very welcoming. They were very open to what I had to offer.”

The set opens with “Paradigm Shift,” an introspective piece written by Clarke following the historic election of Barack Obama, which took place on the day Clarke returned from a long series of international tour dates. “I’d been getting the whole European and Asian perspective,” he says. “There was a lot of energy for Obama over there. There are a lot of reasons why he got elected. It wasn’t just a matter of being the new black guy on the scene...It’s a complete shift in the way people interact with candidates and with government. I was watching all that unfold, and I just kept saying, ‘Wow.’”

Cinematic and sweeping, “Sicilian Blue” is a stirring piece written by Hiromi, inspired by her visit to the Mediterranean island in 2008. Per Hiromi’s suggestion, Clarke plays the opening portion with a bow – a difficult technique, he admits, but one with a satisfying payoff. “The place has such a special atmosphere, with all of its old landscapes,” says Hiromi. “It’s hard to explain in words how I write music, but it almost always involves some kind of image in my mind. All of my songs are visual in one way or another.”

“Take the Coltrane” is a sly sounding duet between Clarke and White. “When I hear that tune, what I hear is brotherhood – the brotherhood that has developed over the years between Lenny and me. There are little musical subtleties that can only happen between the two of us...I really get a kick out of playing with Lenny. He’s probably my favorite drummer to play with.”

Also on the nostalgic side is “Isotope,” a tune that Clarke and White played with Joe Henderson in the early days. “I grew up with this tune,” says Clarke. “It was part of my youth. So when I hear it, I think of the early ‘70s and the years I spent with the great Joe Henderson. I was going for that same feel. Whenever I play that tune – or even just hear it – I’m always thinking of Joe.”

“Global Tweak,” a playful and melodic duet between Clarke and Hiromi, is exactly what the title suggests. “We both just sat down and tried to tweak each other musically,” says Clarke. “It was total improvisation. We both really enjoyed this.” Jazz critic Don Heckman points out in his liner notes the beauty of two seemingly disparate perspectives converging so perfectly in a single improvised moment of music: “How fascinating it is to hear these two gifted players – thousands of miles separated by culture, decades different in age – come together in such complete, on-the-spot musical understanding and companionship.”

“Under the Bridge,” a 1991 hit by the Red Hot Chili Peppers, is rearranged here by Hiromi for jazz trio – not as big a leap as it might seem, she notes. “I don’t know how to differentiate jazz from rock,” she says. “It’s so hard for me. When a melody is good, it’s just good. I brought this song up because Stanley and Lenny wanted something that wasn’t a jazz standard, and yet it works so well with the rest of the record.”

In many ways, *Jazz in the Garden* is Stanley Clarke’s way of reconnecting with a time much earlier in his career before his plunge into electric jazz – a time when he earned his stripes playing acoustic bass with some of the most enduring names in the annals of jazz. “There are times when you want to revisit the things that really established the foundation in your life,” he says. “I spent many, many years studying acoustic bass, and many years playing in New York after I left Philadelphia in the late ‘60s. I played with everyone who was there at the time. It was a long time ago, but all that stuff from that period is what made me who I am. This record is my way of reconnecting with that time and that music.”