



Ben Allison Trio - Quiet Revolution

Musicians:

Ben Allison - Bass

Ted Nash - Saxophones and Clarinet

Steve Cardenas - Nylon & Steel String Guitars

It's not that Jim Hall was ever under appreciated. Jim Hall was always known, by anyone who knew what was up, as one of the most important guitarists in Jazz history, but the way he played was so tender, and supportive, that his name never rung out the way some of his contemporaries did. Hall was a capital C composer from the start, and his writing was a vital part of his identity as a musician. His writing continued till the end of his career, and indeed he even grew so far as to write for big bands and symphony orchestras. However, it's also rare to hear people talk about Jim Hall as a composer, and it's refreshing to have that aspect of him highlighted by the luminous **Ben Allison Trio**.

All Across the City, is one of Jim's most well known compositions. For good reason. What a lyrical piece of music. The best tunes are the ones that feel like they've already been there for ever, just waiting to be uncovered. Ben Allison has such a round burnished tone on this piece. Ben's often thought of as a composer and band leader, but I think he has one of the biggest, clearest and unique sounds on the instrument to be found anywhere. Ted Nash's initial entrance is something to be treasured as many times as possible. On the other end of that compositional spectrum, this sounds effortless, but it's a line that couldn't be written with pen and paper in a million years.

Move It is a slippery and smart composition given a new twist by Allison's grooved bass line. The changes are from the standard "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise." It's clear by the way Steve Cardenas opens up this tune why he's one of the most in demand guitarists in New York and was one of the favorite guitarists of late greats like Paul Motian and Charlie Haden. Clear melodic phrasing, gorgeous tone on nylon or steel string, and supportive in all the right spaces. (He's also quickly becoming a staple at Newvelle Records, look for him next year on Jon Cowherd's record). When Ted and Ben start soloing together you can really feel all the years that this band has played in various configurations. They breathe together, the closest thing to telepathy I've heard in many years.

Waltz New is another tricky, smart and subversive contrefact tune, this time over "Someday My Prince Will Come." Again, there's a brilliant display of empathetic

simultaneous soloing. The whole band manages to develop thematic improvised material. Listening to them toss back and forth little melodic fragments is delightful, and they do it with such ease. No wonder this band has taken on the moniker "The Easy Way."

Sleeping Tiger is a re-imagining of one of Allison's compositions from his stellar 2001 record "Riding the Nuclear Tiger." It's got a completely different feel in this context and brings out the melodic content much more sharply. Without the percussion it's easier to hear links with Jim Hall's subversive melodic lines within the tricky juxtapositions of this tune. Nash must have one of the finest tones on clarinet on the planet.

Pony Express is a tune of Jimmy Giuffre's, first played with a trio of Hall and Bob Brookmeyer, as the first part of his "Western Suite." Listen to the way that Allison and Cardenas combine to immediately create that wide expanse of sound. What a way to end the first side. One of the things this trio does so well is not try and compensate for the lack of a percussion instrument. Never over playing and letting the natural timing and breath of the band stand on its own. Listen to the expert way that Cardenas and Allison build tension in the open blowing section under Ted. What a treat.

Careful is a 16 bar blues that Hall wrote in the 50's and is perhaps his most recorded song. This is such a laid back take on the tune, and swings so effortlessly and *hard*. Solos are stellar across the board. Never showy, always melodic, always swinging.

The Train and The River gets us back to Jimmy Giuffre's western infused writing. I love the way he can take such a simple melodic idea and wrap such complex ideas around it. Again Nash plays some clarinet and his tone is striking. Listen to the way he "comps" with Cardenas before laying into some whole notes. It can't be said enough how these guys play *together*. Such a supportive and musical symbioses is a rare thing.

Looking Up was written by Hall for Pat Metheny for a duo record they did in 1999. The take here is a clinic of playing in the "pocket." Ben's brief solo shines. Not just a beautiful tone and approach but a fully conceived improvisational compositional statement. Not bad for 45 seconds.

Truth is Stranger than Fiction is an original by Ted Nash. The melodic, thematic similarities between this and "Sleeping Tiger" show again how simpatico the approaches of Allison and Nash are. Nash might be one of the most under-rated blues saxophonists on the planet. Fearless stuff.

The trio closes the record with the Alex North classic **Love Theme From Spartacus**. Incredibly, Ted Nash's father and uncle both played on the original soundtrack recording. This is a rare faithful rendition of the tune, with the transcribed counter melodies from the original. There's such longing in this composition and in this rendition. There's a romanticism to this band that's an essential but often neglected part of the "New York" sound. This might be a "Quiet Revolution," but it comes from a fierce resolve to play from the heart.

- Elan Mehler