



Jon Cowherd - Gateway

Musicians:

Jon Cowherd - Piano

Brian Blade - Drums

Steve Cardenas - Guitar

Tony Scherr - Bass

*"There is always the feeling that we could go any place without having a destination."
- Brian Blade on playing with Jon Cowherd*

Jon and Brian met in 1988 when they were both studying at Loyola University in New Orleans. Brian had just arrived on campus, and they were assigned to play in the rhythm section for auditioning horn players. As Jon tells it, "We hadn't been formally introduced before we began to accompany the students auditioning but, I immediately felt a commonality with him just from his playing. At the first break he approached me and said, 'Hi, my name is Brian Blade. I feel like we hear music in a similar way.'" They've been playing together ever since, and cofounded the Fellowship Band in 1997.

*"He absolutely influences me and inspires me in the way that his compositions all have a great vibration and mood and architecture."
- Brian Blade on Jon's compositions*

I love that Brian used the word "architecture" to describe Jon's writing. These songs do feel designed almost as much as written. This is not to say they are fussily constructed—melody, rather than harmonic ostentation or ornate structure, is the driving principle on every piece. But around that melodic thread, Cowherd builds castles to explore. *Gateway* is a great title for this record, because there are so many moments in these compositions when you're stepping through some edifice that Cowherd has built and discovering another chamber to explore. There is a wealth of ideas here.

Jon says that he usually constructs his songs out of improvisational moments, so it's a treat to see him build some of these ideas from scratch. Each of the solo piano improvisations on this record has a fully fleshed-out song embedded beneath the surface. Jon's playing displays an uncanny lyricism.

Jon assembled a stellar band for this record. This is Steve Cardenas' second time recording for Newvelle, after shining on Ben Allison's "Quiet Revolution." Steve's one of those New York guys that quietly define what New York Jazz is. He's a first-call guitarist because he can fit his sound into almost any context, but you always know it's him. Tony

Scherr is a quadruple threat—brilliant song writer, singer, guitarist and bassist. In addition to being a formidable singer and composer, Brian Blade is widely considered one of the greatest jazz drummers of all time. However, when you see him play, what jumps out at you is the joy that suffuses him when he's playing. Huge grin, lighting up every beat he touches. It's that ephemeral quality that all of the musicians on this record have. It's not an expertise crafted and funneled into an instrument, but rather talent that looks for an outlet and will take any avenue that it can to escape. In between takes, all of the musicians would pull guitars off the wall and jam. Dance parties broke out regularly.

Jon specifically wrote this music for these musicians and this session. Watching these guys traverse these tunes and finding all the interesting corners to bend their ideas around was a pleasure and an inspiration. There's something here that strikes at the truth of improvised music, a collective attempt to build something unique. A master class on how to take direction without sublimating your own unique perspective. One person builds a gateway and then you walk through it together. The destination? You'll know when you get there.

- Elan Mehler