

By Alex Henderson

Ask most jazz fans where jazz albums are usually recorded, and they are likely to respond, "In recording studios and jazz clubs, or sometimes in smaller theaters or concert halls." But churches aren't exactly the first places that come to mind when one thinks of jazz albums. Some jazz artists might attend churches (or a temple or mosque) if they are spiritually inclined, but they don't record in them. However, an abandoned church in Brooklyn is where guitarist Lage Lund, alto saxophonist Will Vinson and bassist Orlando LeFleming recorded *OWL Trio* in 2011 (OWL stands for Orlando, Will and Lage). Recording in that church was photographer Jimmy Katz' idea, and while the musicians were understandably skeptical at first, they checked out the acoustics and decided to follow his suggestion. Recording equipment was set up, and Katz produced this memorable CD.

A relaxed, laid-back mood dominates this release, which is greatly influenced by cool jazz and favors a very sparse, airy sound. Lund and Vinson's interaction, in fact, recalls guitarist Jim Hall's encounters with alto saxophonist Paul Desmond, and the three improvisers make extensive use of space whether they are playing Tin Pan Alley songs (including Cole Porter's "From This Moment On" and Jerome Kern's "Yesterday"), Hall's "All Across the City," Duke Ellington's "Morning Glory" or Brazilian artist Toninho Horta's "Blues for Jimmy."

In the 1950s, cool jazz was essentially bebop played in a relaxed, understated fashion—and most of the time, that is exactly what *OWL Trio* sounds like. Yet at times, the disc becomes a cool-toned approach to post-bop rather than a cool-toned approach to bebop. John Coltrane's "Dear Lord" is a perfect example. That gem came from Coltrane's modal period; it's a song he recorded after his transition from hard bop to post-bop. But Lund, Vinson and LeFleming approach "Dear Lord" in a totally calm way. They are as relaxed on "Dear Lord" as they are on Paul Weston/Sammy Cahn's "I Should Care" or Gun Arheim's "Sweet and Lovely," offering quite a contrast to the intensity that Coltrane often brought to modal jazz in the early to mid-1960s. And that spirit of interpretation is a plus. Jazz, after all, is meant to be the sound of surprise (to borrow a phrase from the late Whitney Balliett), not the sound of note-for-note emulation. So it makes perfect sense for the OWL Trio to play a Coltrane gem in a way that is not Coltrane-ish.

Katz obviously knew what he was talking about when he suggested recording an album in an abandoned church. On this contemplative CD, the Owl Trio really thrives in that environment.

B.D. Lenz

READY OR NOT—Jade Buddha 113. BDLenz.com. *Honus; Blues for Red; Ready or Not; How Deep Is Your Love?; Sunny Tuesday; Walt's Waltz; The Sea, The Sky; Source of Reason; Solar; Say You Will*

PERSONNEL: B.D. Lenz, electric guitar, producer; Ken Pendergast, acoustic bass; Able

Fogle, drums; Matt Scarano, drums; Benjamin Drazen, saxophone; Jeremy Grenhart, acoustic piano, electric keyboards



By Alex Henderson

Guitarist B.D. Lenz is not a major name in the jazz world, but the North Jersey resident has been building his catalogue since the 1990s and has at least eight CDs available as a leader (some on Jade Buddha Records, some on Apria Records). Lenz' most recent album is *Ready or Not*, a solid effort that touches on post-bop, hard bop, fusion and even crossover jazz on occasion. Drawing on direct or indirect influences that range from George Benson to John Scofield, Lenz demonstrates that he isn't lacking in the chops department and has a strong command of his instrument.

Ready or Not is a largely a trio album, uniting Lenz' guitar with Ken Pendergast on acoustic bass and Abe Fogle or Matt Scarano on drums. The guitar trio format serves Lenz well on Miles Davis' "Solar" as well as funky, hard-swinging originals such as "Blues for Red" and the title track. But the trio becomes a quintet with the addition of acoustic pianist/electric keyboardist Jeremy Grenhart and saxman Benjamin Drazen on "Sunny Tuesday" and "The Sea, The Sky." *Ready or Not* has its share of aggressive, hard-edged performances, yet Lenz takes a quiet, airy, contemplative approach on "Say You Will," "Source of Reason" and a delicate, somewhat Pat Metheny-ish interpretation of the Bee Gees' "How Deep Is Your Love." The latter is the closest this album comes to smooth jazz, but it should be stressed that even at his most gentle and caressing, Lenz does not play "elevator muzak." There is a difference between sweet and saccharine, and while a lot of smooth jazz is saccharine, Lenz' version of the Bee Gees' is never saccharine—sweet, yes, but never saccharine. It still has a brain.

The fact that Lenz is capable of being forceful one minute and gently introspective the next demonstrates that he is far from a one-trick pony. Lenz keeps things unpredictable: he can be edgy and assertive, or he can be vulnerable. It all depends on what strikes his fancy at a given moment. And during the course of 47 minutes, *Ready or Not* paints a favorable picture of the North Jersey guitarist.

Bill Mays

LIFE'S A MOVIE – Chiaroscuro CD (D) 400 www.chiaroschurojazz.com. *Homage To Bill Evans: My Bells/Interplay/Turn Out The Stars/Waltz For Debby; Life's A Movie – 4 Cues In Search Of A Film: Main Title/Love Theme Bittersweet/Chase/End Credits; Concierto de Aran-*

juez; Spain; Monk Tribute: Trinkle Tinkle/Pannonica; Straight No Chaser

PERSONNEL: Bill Mays, piano; Marvin Stamm, trumpet, flugelhorn; Alisa Horn, cello



By Scott Yanow

The Bill Mays Inventions Trio first came together in 2004. The veteran pianist and his long-time associate trumpeter Marvin Stamm were visiting Dr. Howard Horn in Memphis. Mays played a couple of classical pieces with Horn's daughter cellist Alisa Horn and encouraged her to improvise on Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise." She did very well and Mays and Stamm soon decided to form a trio with her even though she had not played jazz before.

The trio recorded in 2005 and has performed together on an occasional basis ever since. On *Life's A Movie*, the setting proves to be a particularly ideal one for Mays. A virtuoso based in bop who is a wide-ranging improviser, Mays does not need a bassist or a drummer in order to sound at his best. In fact, the lack of those instruments allows one to fully appreciate the active and creative playing of his left hand which might otherwise have been partly covered up. Marvin Stamm, who first came to fame with the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra in the late 1960s, is still very much in his musical prime, playing crisp solos in which every note counts, even on up-tempo tunes. As for the much younger Alisa Horn, she certainly does not sound as if jazz is her second language. On some numbers she mostly plays her cello like a string bass but she is also masterful when using the bow, displaying a beautiful tone. In addition she occasionally emulates a rhythm guitar.

The music on *Life's A Movie* is programmed into four sections. The first four selections are all Bill Evans compositions. "My Bells" is taken by Mays as a quietly emotional and sophisticated piano solo. "Interplay" is a minor-toned blues with a memorable melody. In addition to their fine solos, Stamm and Mays play off each other, justifying the piece's title. While Alisa Horn keeps the music swinging on "Interplay" by walking her instrument like a bass, she bows the passionate melody of "Turn Out The Stars" with accompaniment by Mays. The three musicians share the lead and take concise solos on Evans' most famous original, "Waltz For Debby."

The next four Mays pieces could fit the title of "Soundtrack In Search Of A Movie." "Main Theme" does sound like the title cut of a film although it is probably a bit more complex than most; it develops quite a bit during its seven minutes. "Theme Bittersweet" is about a love affair that is far from smooth sailing while "Chase" is hyper. "End Credits" is a bit reminiscent in spots of the "Main Theme" although