

FRANCESCO CROSARA CIRCULAR MOTION

"I refuse to be labeled a 'straightahead' player or a 'fusion' player," says Italian-born, Seattle-based pianist Francesco Crosara. It's a sentiment widely shared by jazz musicians, though they follow many different roads to get to that place. Crosara, for his part, plays both acoustic piano and Yamaha MODX-8 synthesizer on this absorbing, varied program of original music for three different trio lineups, two of them with electric bass. He cites the influence of Chick Corea, a mentor and family friend who once wrote to Crosara: "Francesco, your music is wonderful, always has been. Play what you love and saturate the world with it."

Crosara states: "Chick was always innovative in using different bands in different situations. Some of his groups featured jazz legends, others new young talent, or everything in between. I try to do that myself, rather than focus on a single working band, which obviously has its advantages but is also a bit limiting. I'm more interested in discovering new talent and new sounds, and the different approaches to the music that each musician brings."

Crosara debuted with the quartet release *Energy* in 1992; his 1999 outing *Colors* received four stars in DownBeat. In 2008 he released the beautiful *Notes: Piano Solo Live*. His first trio release was *Kurama* in 2009, followed by the live trio album *Concerto* in 2011 for a limited Italian release. *Circular Motion* includes fresh interpretations of some of this repertoire, which was composed over a period of 40 years. The goal was to highlight that constant evolution, that Circular Motion, that occurs when an artist plays the long game as deftly as Crosara.

The four acoustic numbers—**Longing**, **Gymnopédie No. 4**, **Maktoub** and the title track **Circular Motion**—highlight the rich timbre and presence of double bassist Clipper Anderson and the supple rhythmic flow and texture of drummer Mark Ivester. These are the older heads, seasoned and authoritative in their approach to Crosara's tunes. "I tailor the songs to the musicians," Crosara says. "'Longing' just calls out for that big resonant acoustic bass, whereas **Preludio Flamenco** is aching for a guitar-like approach, which Farko Dosumov employs on the five-string electric."

Dosumov and drummer D'Vonne Lewis, the first rhythm section we hear on *Circular Motion*, represent the mid-40s contingent. They bring a fluid, contemporary post-Jaco feel to **Julia's Tango**,

Passion and **One Day Honey**, **One Day Onions**, as well as the Corea and Paco de Lucia-influenced "Preludio Flamenco" mentioned above.

"Then in the last trio, which has more of a world music approach, we have Osama Afifi on bass and Xavier LeCouturier on drums," says Crosara. "Osama is very different from Farko, much less Jaco-influenced and more in the mold of Stanley Clarke or Anthony Jackson. Xavier is only 24 years old, with really monster technique. At 24 there is a different outlook on life than age 40 or 60. It's fascinating how so much goes into playing—age, energy, maturity—and you can expect a different result from a musician who has had a great deal of life experience, as opposed to someone fresh off the block."

This "world" trio works out on **Kurama** and **Sarava**, at the middle and end of the program respectively. The former is an evocation of Mount Kurama north of Kyoto, Japan, adapted from a previously recorded three-movement suite; the latter a Brazilian-themed sendoff, in fact one of Crosara's earliest compositions (from 1981). "Songs go through their own evolution, like people," the pianist muses. "In 2019 I took the original form of 'Sarava' after almost 40 years and enhanced it with a new rubato section and tight obbligato parts to support each solo. The new version, a true suite in three parts, is much more complex, while retaining the joie de vivre of the original."

On both his instruments, Crosara exhibits a finely honed vocabulary and alert, sparkling touch, locking in creatively with his cohorts in each of the three settings. He dedicates the album to his mother, the one-of-a-kind jazz singer, producer and broadcaster Lillian Terry, who passed not long before this album's release. Described by writer and friend Raul Da Gama as "a peripatetic Italian ambassador of jazz," Terry recorded for Soul Note with Tommy Flanagan (1982) and Dizzy Gillespie (1985). She and her son co-led a crisp 2003 date, *Emotions*, featuring late Chicago tenor legend Von Freeman, who also played on *Colors*. "Vonski was another big mentor for me," Crosara recalls. "The greatest advice he gave me: Only two things matter in music—timing and space."

You can hear how that formative advice has shaped Crosara. Along with Von Freeman, he knew Gillespie, Corea, Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln and many of the jazz legends in his mother's orbit. His rhythmic instincts, his improvisational grace and his expressive range make clear that his contact with jazz from the very source informs every note he plays. Circular Motion tells that wondrous story of continual artistic growth.

David R. Adler

- 1 **PRELUDIO FLAMENCO** 6:01
- 2 **LONGING** 6:24
- 3 **JULIA'S TANGO** 6:53
- 4 **GYMNOPÉDIE NO. 4** 8:07
- 5 **CIRCULAR MOTION** 6:32
- 6 **KURAMA** 9:48
- 7 **PASSION** 8:08
- 8 **MAKTOUB** 7:48
- 9 **ONE DAY HONEY ONE DAY ONIONS** 6:22
- 10 **SARAVA** 6:14

Compositions by Francesco Crosara / Ecila Music, BMI

Produced by Francesco Crosara
Recorded & mixed by David Lange at David Lange Studios, Edgewood, WA
on January 17 & 18, 2022; Assistant Engineer: Benjamin Lange
Mastered by Ross Nyberg at Nyberg Mastering, Issaquah, Washington
Liner notes by David R. Adler
Band photos by Francesco Crosara; Francesco photo by Julia Crosara
Cover design & layout by John Bishop

This album is dedicated to the loving memory of my mother, Lillian Terry, who provided life-long inspiration and enabled me to embrace my own music career through her life in jazz.