

A photograph of a Black man with short dreadlocks, wearing a black leather jacket with a thick brown fur collar. He is looking down and slightly to his left. The background is a blurred city street with buildings and a cloudy sky.

Victor Gould In Our Time



Blue Room Music

- 
1. **Blue Lotus** 5:11
 2. **Lord Wallace** 5:40
 3. **Dear Ralph** 5:29
 4. **Resilience** 4:30
 5. **Showtime** 4:39
 6. **Queen Alma** 4:24
 7. **Ascension** 4:06
 8. **Infant Eyes** 5:36
 9. **Minority** 4:05
 10. **In Our Time** 4:25
 11. **In Memoriam** 5:05

All songs composed by **Victor Gould** except for
Infant Eyes (**Wayne Shorter**) and Minority (**Gigi Gryce**)

Co produced by **Victor Gould, Godwin
Louis, and Chan Jung**

Recorded at Sear Sound Studio on February
8 & 26, 2021

Mixed by **Chris Allen**

Mastered by **Nate Wood**

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Victor Gould - piano / composer / arranger

Tamir Shmerling - bass

Anwar Marshall - drums

special guests

Dayna Stephens - tenor saxophone (tracks 8&9)

on track 11

Yoojin Park - violin I

Monica Martin - violin II

Erica Gailing - viola

Dale Jeong - cello



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The title of pianist and composer Victor Gould's fourth outing as a leader, *In Our Time*, is subject to interpretation. Predominantly a trio set with bassist Tamir Shmerling and drummer Anwar Marshall, the album emerges at a time of reopening and renewal, with people hopefully awakened to new possibilities at an important crossroads. Gould suggests another meaning as well: "The fact that we're all contemporaries, sharing this lifetime in common, is something very special. We're all alive at the same time. It's our time. The fact that we're even alive during this time should mean that we can relate on some level."

For top-tier musicians like Gould and his colleagues, existing at the same time as master teachers and mentors is even more a gift, never to be taken for granted. With *In Our Time* Gould pays homage to two of them, recently departed: trumpeter Wallace Roney ("Lord Wallace") and drummer Ralph Peterson, Jr. ("Dear Ralph"). For good measure, the album's one solo piano cut, the beautiful waltz "Queen Alma," is dedicated to Gould's late grandmother (and by extension the younger of his two daughters, who shares a middle name in common).

"I was a member of Wallace's band for four years," says Gould, "and we made the album *Understanding*. He had such a big impact on my life, hiring me right after I moved to New York." In addition to years of small-group work, Gould held the piano chair in Roney's large ensemble, which premiered the long-lost Wayne Shorter opus "Universe" in 2013. Peterson, for his part, was one of Gould's professors at Berklee and asked the pianist to join his band during freshman year. "I played on his record *The Duality Perspective* a few years after that," Gould notes. "He was a mentor who became a true friend. He invited me to his house for Thanksgiving dinner when he knew I was in the dorms and couldn't go home. He was also a brilliant composer who influenced me in a lot of ways with specific devices, things that were iconic and unique. In the take of 'Dear Ralph' that we used, Anwar plays a very noticeable Ralph lick right at the top, so there's no way we couldn't put his name on it."

Gould does his late mentors proud with *In Our Time* in another respect. His previous releases — *Clockwork*, *Earthlings*, *Thoughts Become Things* — involved a denser instrumentation and additional soloists, but *In Our Time* is devoted mainly to the trio, with Gould's distinctive piano voice far more exposed. "Being at home and off the road, really getting to practice, spending extended amounts of time on the instrument reminded me of when I was in college, practicing five or six hours a day," Gould says. "I felt confident taking on some more of the burden, playing the melodies myself, having time to work on things. It was the perfect opportunity to focus on the trio."

Tenor sax master and fellow Monk Institute alumnus Dayna Stephens, who appeared on *Thoughts Become Things*, returns here for a churning polyrhythmic treatment of Gigi Gryce's "Minority" and a striking midtempo swing interpretation of the Wayne Shorter ballad "Infant Eyes." On the latter, Stephens begins improvising right away and saves the melody until the end, an idea that Gould credits to his coproducer, dear friend and Blue Room Music labelmate Godwin Louis (an alto sax sideman on all of Gould's previous albums, now bumped up in rank to the control booth). "Godwin was at all the rehearsals and the sessions," Gould notes, "and he'd already given me a lot of great ideas even before the music was done."

One of those was to close the album with a string quartet rendering of Gould's "In Memoriam," which incorporates the trio as well. Gould composed the piece for sextet in 2010 (originally as "Side Angle") and had the chance to expand it for full orchestra — in fact, his seven-minute through-composed version won Loyola University's Concerto, Aria and Composition Competition in 2011. Here Gould pares it down, renaming it in a gesture of mourning for all those lost to the pandemic.

All the trio pieces on *In Our Time* are new, save for the leadoff track "Resilience," which was the closing track when it appeared on *Earthlings* in 2018 (with percussion from Kahlil Kwame Bell). Gould approaches it this time with a more urgent uptempo feel, encouraging Marshall to rework the groove entirely. "I first met Anwar in Orrin Evans' Captain Black Big Band," says the pianist, "and we played in Jazzmeia Horn's band as well. Tamir I met playing with French vocalist Marie Davy. No matter what it is, even a cocktail gig, he's always giving 100 percent, and the more time I spent with him, the more I realized how common our influences are. The three of us are around the same age, and that's significant when it comes to how we see the music. When I bring in new songs they know all the references. It's very natural. It's a long-term thing I'm trying to keep together with this trio."

The trio's dynamism and tight rapport are apparent throughout, for instance on "Blue Lotus," which emerged from a burst of inspiration after Gould was awarded a 2020 Chamber Music American grant. The piece ebbs and flows between a knotty repeated rhythmic figure, a flowing melodic motive played *rubato*, and a middle section in half-time with dramatic low-register unisons. It's one of Gould's more heavily notated pieces, though he bursts through with darting improvisation before the last *rubato* cue.

In a more subdued vein, the ballad "Showtime" evokes those moments of life on the road, particularly with young kids waiting back at home, when the artist is compelled to "bring it" in performance, night after night, no matter what. Being a musician is more than just a job, but often it is that too.

"Ascension" has another life, as the leadoff track from the 2020 album of the same name by the Black Art Jazz Collective: a sextet of young heavyweights, nominally led by Wayne Escoffery and Jeremy Pelt, in which all six members are called on to compose for the group. Here we get to hear one of Gould's Black Art contributions, complex and modern with a hard-swinging element at the core, reframed in a trio setting, with Gould, Shmerling and Marshall fully in the spotlight. "In Our Time," with its animated 6/8 feel and rich and flowing counterpoint, brings us deeper still into the trio's intimate world. Gould is radiant in his solo, and Shmerling too, achieving a refined expression in his instrument's high register.

Not to romanticize the harsh realities of quarantine, but Gould's newly invigorated trio focus is one of its unforeseen results, a silver lining, a product of extended reflection at the piano (in a new house, where Gould is able to practice at all hours — another major change that came in 2020). "Drastic" is the word Gould uses for the impact his isolated focus had on the direction of this recording. Another word is "freedom" — the freedom to create, to connect all the dots, to delve into the instrument anew and follow where it leads. That this has occurred *In Our Time* is yet one more reason for us, as listeners, to be grateful.

— David R. Adler