

# LIFTED LAND DAVID BINNEY

1. **FANFARE FOR BASU**  
(D. Binney) 2.24
2. **THE ROAD TO YOUR HOUSE**  
(D. Binney) 7.01
3. **AS SNOW BEFORE  
A SUMMER SUN**  
(D. Binney) 18.34
4. **THE BLUE WHALE**  
(D. Binney) 11.54
5. **CURIOUS ABOUT TEXAS**  
(D. Binney) 5.17
6. **LIFTED LAND**  
(D. Binney) 6.23
7. **LOSING THE CENTRAL  
VALLEY**  
(D. Binney) 3.26
8. **RED CLOUD**  
(C. Taborn) 3.31

**TOTAL TIME:** 58.34

**DAVID BINNEY** alto sax  
**CRAIG TABORN** piano  
**EIVIND OPSVIK** bass  
**TYSHAWN SOREY** drums

# David Binney Lifted Land

**Craig Taborn  
Eivind Opsvik  
Tyshawn Sorey**



Criss Cross Jazz 1358

## Lifted Land

In September 2011 **David Binney** brought his quartet to the Rubin Museum of Art in New York, and he did something bold: he played a single extended composition for the whole show. It was called ***As Snow Before a Summer Sun***, a title inspired by the book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. A shortened, 18-minute version appears on **Lifted Land**, Binney's sixth recording for Criss Cross.

The thought occurred to Binney to devote the entire album, just like the concert, to this open-ended piece of music. "But as I got into it," Binney says, "I realized I wanted to play a few other things I was writing, some of which were in the same vein as the longer piece." The result is Binney's third wholly original **Criss Cross** program, after **Cities and Desire** (Criss 1285) and **Barefooted Town** (Criss 1335).

In venturing what might be the longest single track ever to appear on this label, Binney wants to draw us in deep, to remind us that close listening to a beautifully realized long-form piece of work is time well spent. What amazes, then, is the fact that these eight substantial tracks were all cut in a day. "There are a few sections that are difficult," says Binney, "but other than that the stuff is really not that hard, even though it's very composed. The hardest thing about any of it is the piano part. That's always the case in my music. As long as **Craig Taborn** gets the material together, then we'll be fine. And he did."

Taborn, who appeared on **Cities and Desire** as well as Alex Sipiagin's **Destinations Unknown** (Criss 1336), brings a harmonic breadth and command worthy of one of our most sought-after pianists (his work with Tim Berne, Chris Potter, Tomasz Stanko and many more speaks for itself). Bassist **Eivind Opsvik**, who played on **Barefooted Town** and **Aliso** (Criss 1322), not to mention John Escree's **Exception to the Rule** (Criss 1340), often plays a subtle melodic role, doubling lines unpredictably, flourishing both within the ensemble and apart from it as a soloist. "I wrote more for the bass on this record than any I'd done before," says Binney, and he knew well that Opsvik would deliver.

Drummer **Tyshawn Sorey**, who played the Rubin Museum gig, makes his first **Criss Cross** appearance here, filling a spot often held in Binney's bands by Dan Weiss. A formidable talent on many instruments, Sorey has elevated the music of Fieldwork, Vijay Iyer, Dave Douglas, Samuel Blaser and many others. "He's got a photographic memory," Binney says. "That long piece that we played, Tyshawn just heard it once when we rehearsed, and the next time I saw him, at the gig, he could sing everything. He didn't have the chart. He just remembered it."

The opening chops-buster ***Fanfare for Basu*** prompts Binney to qualify his statement on the relative ease of the **Lifted Land** session: "Even though it's the shortest thing it was the hardest, yeah. It's



really just a short fanfare, so as long as we got that...." Midway through the piece the band fades completely away, as overdubbed saxophones and synthesizer transform the music into something else entirely. Binney did this creative multi-tracking at home: "Metrically the saxophone parts are different: I play one phrase in three, one in four, one in five and I think another one. It was very in the moment. I added a couple of synthesizer things near the end and I brought the band back in, in time, where they were in the improvisation. So I took them out for a minute, put my own stuff in for a minute, and then faded them back in." ("Basu" is Binney's cat.)

For Binney, *The Road to Your House* seemed to evoke "a Japanese garden, a roadway in the country, some sort of road to something." Opsvik's smooth-as-silk unison doubling proves central to the theme, which sounds light and hopeful, somehow in tension with the surrounding harmonic density. The solos are in a relaxed straight-eighth feel, but Binney and Taborn each raise the temperature, aided by Sorey's shifting and incisive rhythms.

*As Snow Before a Summer Sun* first strikes the ear as a mysterious type of ballad. Ultimately the structure becomes clear: a succession of short, slightly accelerating themes, with unaccompanied solo passages from each band member in between. Opsvik takes his turn fully on the bow, and Sorey delves into gong and cymbal sounds of pure unhurried abstraction. The last "solo" goes to the full band out of

tempo, and then the themes are recapitulated without the improvised breaks. Finally, an anthemic three-chord vamp brings the performance to a peak, with a resolving cadence as the final flourish.

"There are a couple of pieces besides this one — *Curious About Texas* and *Losing the Central Valley* — that were part of a theme for this record," Binney explains. "The idea was that I would write these almost semi-classical things and we would improvise freely in between them." Everything hinged on trust between the fellow players, but "that's why I left a lot of open sections on this record," Binney remarks. "That's what I wanted to hear, because they're all so creative."

*The Blue Whale* is the name of a respected creative jazz club in Los Angeles. "I wrote this for a gig I had there," Binney says. "It's the only one on the record that we'd actually been playing live a lot. It's very easy, it's basically just a vamp — it works really well and it's a lot of fun to play." Opsvik's anchoring double-stops, the flowing alto-piano unisons, the live energy unleashed by Sorey and Taborn in particular: this "just a vamp" tune has a way of gathering into something much more.

*Curious About Texas* "was just me being curious about Texas," Binney says. "It's one of the few places I haven't been to much. I was always curious about going to San Antonio and the hill country.

I had a gig there and wound up with a few days free beforehand, so I went down early, stayed in San Antonio and drove around the hill country. It's one of the best places I've ever been." What a drive it was: the furiously dissonant tune, with free sections in the midst of intricate written passages, has a logic not unlike *As Snow Before a Summer Sun*, but an outcome far more unsettled.

*Lifted Land* is another title drawn from *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, so the reference is to land "lifted," taken, from Native Americans. "I've always been fascinated with that time," says Binney. "But beyond its real meaning in the book, the words somehow had an interesting resonance out of context." A beautiful, evenly paced melody, played by Binney and Taborn in effortless unison, turns into something more frenetic and obsessive, until finally a bright 5/8 groove kicks in for Taborn's riveting solo. "The solo sections are pretty hard," Binney says. And the jaw-dropping unison line that erupts out of left field to end the piece? "That was really, really hard," he adds. "More often when you hear very fast lines in my writing they're the only things that come from the saxophone. I have a feeling that came from something I played on alto. I might have finished it on the piano, but I don't have any technique like that on the piano."

*Losing the Central Valley*, the third and shortest of what Binney calls his "semi-classical" inventions, finds the band segueing without pause from restrained lyrical themes to what could almost be described as

sonic mysticism. "The title refers to the Central Valley in California," says Binney, registering concern for his home state. "Apparently the ground water there is so polluted from pesticides that the most fertile land in the world is being lost."

*Red Cloud*, the last *Wounded Knee* title, is Taborn's moment: a solo piano piece as the finale. "We all played solo pieces during the session, and originally I was going to intersperse them throughout the album," Binney says. Although that plan didn't stick, Taborn's wholly improvised entry "seemed to fit the record," he adds. "It's very compositional, and I love the harmony he was using, which I think was somewhat influenced by the music we'd been playing all day. He seemed to stay within the harmonic language I'd written for the piano on this session. That made it a great way to end."

David R. Adler  
New York, April 2013