



Criss 1379 CD

R&B ADAM ROGERS - DAVID BINNEY

1. **AH-LEU-CHA**
(C. Parker) 6.49
2. **INTROSPECTION**
(Th. Monk) 7.38
3. **IN LOVE IN VAIN**
(J. Kern) 6.38
4. **AFRICAINE**
(W. Shorter) 7.08
5. **DON'T MISUNDERSTAND**
(G. Parks) 7.24
6. **SIPPIN' AT BELL'S**
(M. Davis) 9.05
7. **SKYDIVE**
(F. Hubbard) 7.25
8. **MY SHIP**
(K. Weill-I. Gershwin) 7.18
9. **I FEEL A SONG COMING ON**
(J. McHugh) 7.55

ADAM ROGERS guitar
DAVID BINNEY alto sax
REUBEN ROGERS bass
GERALD CLEAVER drums

Produced by Gerry Teekens
Recording Engineer: Michael Marciano
Mixing: Michael Marciano
Mastering: Michael Marciano
Recorded: February 18, 2014
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Recorded at Systems Two Recording Studios, Brooklyn, N.Y.
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Cover Design: Gerry Teekens/Bloemendaal in Vorm



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TOTAL TIME: 67.24

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R&B

Guitarist **Adam Rogers** and alto saxophonist **David Binney** have recorded together for **Criss Cross** on Binney's Anacapa (Criss 1370) and trumpeter Alex Sipiagin's Balance 38-58 (Criss 1378), as well as Binney's co-led date with pianist Edward Simon, Océanos (Criss 1289). But they can date their musical collaborations all the way back to 1986.

"We were both two years old," Rogers says, laughing, daring me to correct him. "We did three very in-depth records together with *Lost Tribe*. A lot of touring as well. I've also played on quite a few of Dave's records. We have this shared history. When Dave and I play melodies together, I always think, 'Man, I love that sound.' Dave has a special sound in that it's probably a little warmer than most. And I have a dark guitar tone too. There's a blend that we have that has always struck me. That's one of the inspirations for wanting to do this album, to explore that further."

Binney adds: "The amount of heads Adam and I have played together is kind of unbelievable. I've never played as much unison with anyone in my life. Not even close." That unique unison blend is everywhere apparent on R&B, a surprising offering for Rogers and Binney in that both are widely known for their ambitious original music. The focus here is standards and canonical pieces by the likes of Freddie Hubbard, Wayne Shorter and Thelonious Monk.

In the past Rogers has recorded tunes by Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, the Gershwins, Charlie Parker and others. His 2009 effort Sight (Criss 1313) was over 50 percent standards and modern jazz covers, but his first three dates for this label — Art of the Invisible (Criss 1223), Allegory (Criss 1242) and Apparitions (Criss 1263) — were dense with original material, almost suite-like in scope.

Binney, known for such forward-thinking, all-original statements as Anacapa, Barefooted Town (Criss 1335) and Lifted Land (Criss 1358), has also recorded music by Wayne Shorter, Sam Rivers, Duke Ellington and Monk. "This literature and tradition is something that we both come from so strongly as listeners and players," Rogers maintains. "It was nice to go through the various parts of the history of the music and choose tunes that we both love, ranging from the '40s to the '70s — an important time span for both of us."

The impetus for R&B was a casual standards gig at the 55 Bar in New York, Binney's regular haunt for many years. It felt good, and the decision was made for a co-led album following the same approach. "Dave and I spoke about rhythm section players," Rogers recalls, "and Dave had the great idea of using [drummer] **Gerald Cleaver**, who I'd played with very little. I'd never played straightahead jazz with him, but I knew he was a consummate practitioner of it." Cleaver's Detroit heritage, his deep sense of swing and all its history, comes through on every track.

Binney remarks: "Gerald is into every kind of music and knows it all really well. He also knows rock really well. I've played a lot of trio with him and [bassist] Thomas Morgan, and I've never had so much fun in my life playing straightahead." An accomplished sideman with Tomasz Sta ko, Craig Taborn, Michael Formanek, Matthew Shipp, Chris Lightcap and many others, Cleaver has also made a mark with his groundbreaking bands Violet Hour, Uncle June, Black Host and Farmers By Nature.

It was Rogers who recruited bassist **Reuben Rogers** — and how could the shared last name not somehow add to their bonhomie? "I've played with Reuben a little bit and I've always been a huge fan of his playing, sound and feel," says the guitarist.

At 40, Rogers has shown great strength and versatility in the trenches with everyone from Dianne Reeves, Joshua Redman, Aaron Goldberg, Jimmy Greene and Helen Sung to the legendary Charles Lloyd. The ease and authority he displays on these tracks, from the sparsest ballad to the most frenetic tempo, speaks for itself.

The band leads off with Charlie Parker's 1948 classic **Ah-Leu-Cha**, based on "Honeysuckle Rose" and a key example of a contrapuntal bebop head ("Chasin' the Bird" is another). "It's more modal than most Bird tunes," Rogers says. "It has that line in the A sections where it's really just these variations on G minor. There's very little of the kind of dominant-tonic thing that you would normally hear in a Bird tune. It's eight bars of just G dorian mode. It always struck me as a forward-thinking melodic concept for a tune from the '40s. I just transcribed the arrangement that's on [Miles Davis's] *'Round About Midnight*: the second line underneath the melody that Trane plays, and the trading with the drums is the same thing they do with Philly Joe. Dave plays the main melody and I play the counterline, then we switch, and by the last chorus we both double the main melody."

Rogers says of Monk's brilliantly elliptical **Introspection**: "I first heard it on *The Straight Horn of Steve Lacy* with Roy Haynes, John Ore and Charles Davis on baritone sax. I was always really taken with it. As with so many Monk tunes, there's a melody always lurking in the background that's sort of trying to instruct you while you're improvising. When you first look at a Monk tune the chord changes can seem obtuse. Of course, if you listen to Monk, he always has this incredible voice leading sense and it always sounds totally logical. After a while it reveals itself to you. It's very gratifying once you figure out your way around it."

Bill Evans, Nina Simone and many others have recorded Jerome Kern's *In Love In Vain*, but Rogers' love of the tune stems from the version on Keith Jarrett's *Standards, Vol. 2* (1985). The treatment here is midtempo swing, on the mellow side, with Cleaver starting on brushes. Rogers' rhythmic displacements and Binney's piquant bluesy inflections show the range of their improvising, their ability to stretch while still keeping in the pocket. "It's a really fun tune to play, one of my favorite things on the record," Binney comments. "It's absolutely a typical, beautiful standard," Rogers adds, "with really strong melodic content. I've been playing it over the years and I thought it would be great for this record."

Binney chose Wayne Shorter's **Africaine**, from an album of the same name that Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers recorded in 1959 but shelved for two decades. This was Shorter's first recording with Blakey, in fact one of his earliest studio sessions. "Wayne is one of my ultimate heroes obviously, and I just love playing his tunes," Binney says. (He's recorded *"Teru," "Lester Left Town"* and *"Toy Tune"* on previous albums.) "Even though his tunes can be hard, they always feel very natural right away. Maybe it's because I hear music in that way." Binney solos first as the feel shifts from an Afro-Latin groove to straight swing. Rogers follows and then Rogers, bassist, takes his first solo of the date and makes it count.

Don't Misunderstand, composed by Gordon Parks, is also Binney's choice. Rogers' sparse whole-note comping frames the melody perfectly, moving bar-to-bar in step with Rogers and Cleaver, staying out of the way while Binney "sings." "It's a great tune and we decided that it would be the alto feature," Rogers says, also noting the song's subtle R&B flavor. Binney elaborates: "The original version I grew up with was by O.C. Smith, which is very produced, one of those records from the '70s with strings and horns. I've played

it a lot in the last couple of years with various people. Drummers tend to want to take it double-time, which drives me crazy, especially on this tune. I just wanted to keep it in that [ballad] zone on everybody's instrument, including myself — I usually try to play a lot less on this, and the tune lends itself to that."

Sippin' at Bell's, a fast, reharmonized blues from Miles Davis's debut session on Savoy (with Charlie Parker, 1947), truly captures the Rogers-Binney unison rapport mentioned above. In choosing it, Rogers' reference point was less Miles and Bird than Jackie McLean on Sonny Clark's 1958 release *Cool Struttin'* (also featuring Art Farmer, Paul Chambers and Philly Joe Jones). "There's something joyous but sort of complicated about it," Rogers says, "and I thought it would be great to do with Dave, given that it has an alto saxophone history." Rogers begins his solo with an almost Ornette Colemanesque melodic sparseness, digging into the blues aspect of the piece and less the convoluted chord changes of the head. The same is true of Binney, who follows in hard-swinging form before yielding to Rogers (on bass), and finally a round of full-chorus trading with Cleaver.

Skydive, the title track from Freddie Hubbard's 1972 album for CTI, has an elaborate 76-bar form with very specific rhythmic hits and an enduringly singable melody. The structure is so mapped out that nothing need be done in terms of an arrangement. "I grew up with that tune," Binney says. "It's a record my parents had and they used to play it all the time. It was always played on the radio in LA. I've played it a lot with my band before and thought it would be nice to record sometime." Binney and Rogers solo in succession, keeping the momentum of the groove while alighting on new harmonic discoveries.

Rogers picked Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin's timeless ballad *My Ship* and found a

personal approach to it. "I thought of playing the first A sections free," he says, "so I start out playing the first A with just Gerald. I think he and I had been messing around with something and I was reminded of how beautifully he plays free music. I thought, let's do that, and then when we get to the B section just make it more of a traditional ballad. The melody is so extraordinary and it also has that little tag that makes it a little bit different. A couple of years ago I did this big band thing in Europe with Terri Lyne Carrington, and Gil Goldstein was doing the arrangements. He brought in the Gil Evans arrangement from *Miles Ahead*. It's so unbelievable and I was reminded how much I love that tune. My intro was influenced by that arrangement, with some more chromatic harmonies. A tune like *My Ship* you could almost play anything underneath the melody and it retains its identity and strength."

I Feel A Song Coming On, a Jimmy McHugh swinger and vehicle for Judy Garland, is just the sort of optimistic pop fare that Sonny Rollins always loved to import into jazz. His 1956 version from *Sonny Rollins + 4* — with Clifford Brown and Max Roach and the tempo cranked way up — is the basic model for this rousing **R&B** set closer. "It's a corny old tune but I love the arrangement," says Rogers, who chose it. "It has this open figure over the A section that they just lay on, and then it goes into more traditional changes but always comes back to this figure. It provides an alternate theme to extrapolate from when we're improvising."

The decision to undertake **R&B** with minimal rehearsal, "in the spirit of an older jazz record where there were sometimes few or minimal arrangements," as Rogers puts it, was a conscious one. "I was thinking of writing some more complicated arrangements but Dave suggested we not do anything very complex and just play the tunes.

Upon reflection, I agreed with that. So there wasn't a lot of memory and brain activity going on in terms of form, meter and so on. Every song we chose has a very strong melody. A couple of them we barely ran through before recording. One of the things I like about that approach is that you oftentimes get something markedly different the first time you play something. Your first take on a piece of music is often so great and spontaneous, possibly because it's before the more reflective, conscious side of the brain decides what it's going to do."

David R. Adler
New York, 2015