

Brad Shepik
Human Activity Suite: Sounding a Response to Climate Change

One of the many unfortunate aspects of the 2008 presidential campaign was a tiresome bout of obscurantism on the root cause of global warming. Hopefully, enough people are aware by this point that the cause is clear: human activity.

Halting and reversing the effects of climate change, once the goal of a committed few, is by now a broadly shared concern. People have a way of waking up when scientific consensus shows that the planet's future hangs in the balance. And the solution lies not just with world leaders and captains of industry, but with ordinary citizens of every nation. To remedy harmful human activity, in other words, we need different, better human activity, and we're starting to see it happen.

Music won't solve the problem, but as one of our most elevated mechanisms of communication, it can raise awareness and spur us to action. Few seem better suited to this task than Brad Shepik, an American jazz guitarist who has traveled the globe and learned from a wide array of musical cultures. With *Human Activity Suite: Sounding a Response to Climate Change*, Shepik extends a long tradition of composers, in jazz and beyond, who have brought social consciousness to bear on their art. His absorbing new music for quintet, inspired by the world's physical grandeur as well as its vulnerability, arises in part from his upbringing in Seattle — "growing up hiking in the Cascades, being an outdoor person, getting around for years with only a bicycle," he remarks.

It was also the writings of Jared Diamond (*Guns, Germs, and Steel* and *Collapse: How Human Societies Made It through Disaster and Why*) and David Quammen (*The Song of the Dodo*) that impelled Shepik to create music evoking the continents, the oceans, the fraught interaction of civilization and nature — the sheer mystery, as Shepik puts it, of "where we fit in this universe, on this piece of rock."

Shepik's previous Songlines effort, *Places You Go* (2007), featured his trio with Gary Versace, arguably the most important keyboard multi-instrumentalist to emerge in the last decade; and drummer Tom Rainey, a Shepik colleague since the early '90s, whose force and musicality makes him indispensable to groups led by Tim Berne, Mark Helias and countless others. With *Human Activity Suite*, Shepik expands the working trio lineup to include trumpeter Ralph Alessi and bassist Drew Gress, both major bandleaders in their own right, who bring endless color and rigor to the 10 pieces that make up this session. "I listen to all their records quite often," says Shepik of his formidable supporting cast. "Their judgments and decisions are so right. To have such a strong connection to people who inform my own work is just incredible."

1. Lima (South America) 7:04
2. Blindspot (North America) 9:26
3. Human Activity 6:59
4. Stir (Antarctica) 5:23
5. Not So Far (Australia) 8:30
6. Current 6:38
7. Carbonic 5:38
8. Blue Marble (Africa) 5:52
9. By a Foot (Europe) 4:25
10. Waves (Asia) 5:57

All compositions by Brad Shepik, Felijar Music (BMI). Produced by Brad Shepik. Executive Producer: Tony Reif. Recorded June 14-15, 2008 by Andy Taub at Brooklyn Recording, Brooklyn NY, assisted by Ben Liscio. Mixed and edited September 7-10, 2008 by John Raham at Ogre Studios, Vancouver BC. Mastered by Graemme Brown at Zen Mastering, Vancouver. Photography by Caroline Mardok. Design by Borzleched.

Thanks to Ralph, Gary, Drew and Tom for their creativity and inspiration in bringing this project to life. Thanks to John Raham and Graeme Brown. Thanks also to Mark Helias, Loren Stillman, Jordan Perlson, Mark Ferber, Matt Darriau, Marc Consoli, Manuel Salvador, Chamber Music America, Tony Reif, my parents Pat and Duane, Kristi and Kasey and my family, Caroline and Louis. Human Activity Suite was created with support from Chamber Music America's New Works: Creation and Presentation Program, funded through the generosity of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Booking: info@companyofheaven.com

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BRAD SHEPIK | HUMAN ACTIVITY SUITE





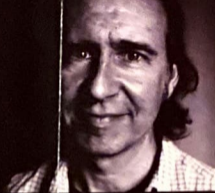
Brad Shepik



Rajesh Alessi



Gary Versace



Drew Gress



Tom Ranney

With the exception of "Current," "Carbonic" and "Human Activity," each of these tracks was written with a specific continent in mind: South America ("Lima"), North America ("Blindspot"), Antarctica ("Stir"), Australia ("Not So Far"), Africa ("Blue Marble"), Europe ("By a Foot") and Asia ("Waves"). "The goal was to try and use indigenous music from each of the continents," says Shepik. "I listened to Chinese orchestra music, different South American music, music from New Guinea. I used this project as an opportunity to go farther." But noting a detail that has held true throughout his career, he adds: "I filtered it all through my own address in Brooklyn. I can't say whether anything is pure this or pure that, but in the end, I'm interested in how these musicians improvise. Even though *Human Activity Suite* is programmatic and has a thematic agenda, that's only one level. There's all this sub-verbal expression going on. I wanted to balance and leave enough space for everyone to be themselves."

In addition to electric and acoustic guitars, Shepik employs the saz and Bulgarian tambura to vary the sonic dimension of the music, drawing on his deep knowledge of Balkan, Turkish and Mediterranean folk idioms. The octaved saz figures of "Current" impart a doleful mood, setting up a Middle Eastern 13/8 feel (in fact a

rhythmic palindrome). "The underlying rhythm reminds me of the motion of water," Shepik says. "Deserts as well — how endless that perspective can be, how the sand moves." With "Stir," he offers, "I thought about the Antarctic ice being infinitely old — this ancient ice that's in motion, melting and moving. I see icebergs breaking apart when I hear this piece."

Versace's instruments, aside from being brilliantly played, lend the music a kinetic sense of texture and tone color, from the leaping accordion lines of "Lima" and "Blue Marble," to the otherworldly organ sounds of "Blindspot," to the resounding acoustic piano of "Not So Far" and "Carbonic," the most explicitly jazz-oriented movements. Shepik crafts astonishing spirals of written melody but also heightens their impact by orchestrating them wisely, with Alessi's angular horn often in the forefront. The volcanic trumpet-guitar lines of "Lima"; the subtle trumpet-bass unisons early on in "Human Activity"; the tambura-trumpet legato phrases that frame Gress's floating improvisation on "Stir"; the dissonance and halting rhythmic pace of "By a Foot"; the raw and distorted electric guitar effects of "Waves": these moments tell us much about Shepik's advanced and imaginative ear.

For Shepik and his colleagues, the long-accepted idea of jazz as an international language is a starting point, a means to a creative end. What Shepik has done with this musical inheritance — with his own groups as well as Pachora, Simon Shaheen, Joey Baron, the Paradox Trio, the Tiny Bell Trio, *Lingua Franca*, George Schuller's *Circle Wide* and others — continues to impact the development of jazz guitar and composition in the young 21st century. With *Human Activity Suite*, we hear the sound of varied strands coming together, a personal statement on the music of the world and the future of society. It's a message not only of urgency and alarm, but also belief in humankind's ability to meet one of the great moral and practical challenges of our time.

David R. Adler
New York, October 2008

