



seamus blake  
sam yahel  
bill stewart

# **circles** jesse van ruller



Criss Cross Jazz 1235

CRISS 1235 CD

Made in Holland D D D

## **CIRCLES** **JESSE VAN RULLER**

1. **ONE**  
(J. Van Ruller) 6.22
2. **CIRCLES**  
(J. Van Ruller) 8.52
3. **HERE COMES THE SUN**  
(J. Van Ruller) 6.44
4. **BLACK DAHLIA**  
(S. Blake) 7.05
5. **33 WALTZ**  
(J. Van Ruller) 6.26
6. **ZOAB**  
(J. Van Ruller) 7.19
7. **GONE WITH THE WIND**  
(Wrubel-Magidson) 7.09
8. **SECRET CHAMP**  
(J. Van Ruller) 8.28

**JESSE VAN RULLER** guitar  
**SEAMUS BLAKE** tenor sax  
**SAM YAHIEL** Hammond B3 organ  
**BILL STEWART** drums

Produced by Gerry Teekens  
Executive Producer: K. Hasselpflug  
Recording Engineer: Max Bolleman  
Recorded: December 15, 2002  
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## Circles

**Jesse van Ruller** makes his home in Amsterdam, but his visibility in the States has been on the rise since he began recording for **Criss Cross**. Prior to 2002, the 31-year-old guitarist had four albums under his belt as a leader, as well as a duo session with fellow plectrist Maarten van der Grinten. These efforts, however, have not been made available beyond Europe and Japan. It wasn't until his appearance on Clarence Penn's fierce quintet outing **Play-Penn** (Criss Cross 1201) that American listeners were afforded a closer look at this 1995 Monk competition winner (the first European ever to take the prize).

Soon enough, label head Gerry Teekens brought Van Ruller across the Atlantic to pilot his own Criss Cross date, **Here and There** (Criss Cross 1217), a hot yet informal affair that featured the leader playing standards and jazz classics in quartet and trio settings.

On **Circles**, the anticipated follow-up, Van Ruller tries his hand at an organ-based quartet. "I hadn't played with organ players before, because where I live there are none," he laughs. **Sam Yahel**, intimately acquainted with jazz guitar vernacular through his work with Peter Bernstein, was a wise choice. In addition to his several Criss Cross appearances, the organist played pivotal roles

in Joshua Redman's **Yaya3** and **Elastic** projects; he also received a very generous shout-out from Norah Jones at the 2003 Grammy Awards. He and Van Ruller had never worked together prior to this session.

Tenor saxophonist **Seamus Blake**, another Monk competition winner, has made four leader statements on Criss Cross, as well as sideman appearances with Billy Drummond, Mark Turner, Darrell Grant, David Kikoski, Conrad Herwig, and Wycliffe Gordon. "Seamus and I played a gig together at the North Sea Jazz Festival, but I'd been a fan of his long before that," Van Ruller discloses, citing Blake's **The Call** (Criss Cross 1088) as one of his favorite records.

The drummer on **The Call** happened to be **Bill Stewart**. "Bill plays with every major guitar player in the world," Van Ruller enthuses. "He really appreciates the instrument. I know his playing well from listening to all those other players." Stewart has appeared on Criss Cross with Walt Weiskopf, Bill Charlap, Peter Bernstein, Scott Colley, and Wycliffe Gordon; he's also done high-profile work with Pat Metheny, Larry Goldings, and Chris Potter, among others. Like Yahel, he had never before worked with Van Ruller, but their chemistry is undeniable.



To balance out the standards-oriented **Here and There**, Van Ruller made a point of generating new material for **Circles**. "I love to write, especially when I know the lineup," he remarks. "And this time I was already hearing Bill Stewart in my head." The program begins, fittingly, with **One**. Swinging hard from the outset, the group sails over the briskly moving changes. Van Ruller displays blazing chops and impeccable time, followed by Blake, Yahel, and Stewart in the solo queue. After the first 12 bars of the melody, we hear a seemingly odd-metered passage, alternating between seven and nine beats. As Van Ruller reveals, this is simpler than it seems: "It's written all in four, but with different accents."

The rhythmic trickery continues with **Circles**, a soul-drenched theme that seems ideal for an organ modernist like Yahel. "I actually thought of it as a drummer's tune when I wrote it," Van Ruller says. "The one is not incorporated in the bass line, so it starts on the second quarter note. But when the melody comes in it's very straight." Blake and Van Ruller play a devious little pickup phrase in unison, making the rhythmic framework clear but never obvious.

Next is **Here Comes the Sun**, a lyrical ballad owing little if

anything to The Beatles. Blake gives the melody a heartfelt reading and follows an intense Van Ruller in the solo order. Raising the flame again, Blake offers his own **Black Dahlia**, which alternates between syncopated funk and open swing. "Seamus has a very recognizable writing style," says Van Ruller. "He takes a fairly simple idea and does so much with it."

**33 Waltz** opens with a strong, almost fanfare-like ensemble figure and incorporates a subtle metric change in the 11th and 12th bars of the melody. "Instead of two groups of three," Van Ruller explains, "it becomes three groups of two. We kept that for the soloing too, to give it something different." **Zoab** includes another memorable ensemble motif, but begins by setting angular unison lines against an off-kilter funk groove. "Bill came up with a great feel for this," Van Ruller remarks. "I wanted to write a bass line with a lot of space, so Bill could do his thing."

A certain guitar icon recorded **Gone With the Wind** in a midtempo version for 1960's *The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery*. Unlike Wes, Van Ruller slows the chestnut down to a ballad, bringing out stark similarities to Jobim's "Once I Loved." "I did something with the changes," he points out, "and there's one spot in the

middle where it really sounds like the Jobim tune. That might even be why I thought of those changes, but it wasn't on purpose."

**Secret Champ**, the quasi-boogaloo finale, takes its title from Le Champ Secret ("the secret field"), a French village where Van Ruller once vacationed. The tune first appeared at a brighter tempo on the leader's 2001 outing **Catch!**, colored through and through by wah-wah guitar and Fender Rhodes. Van Ruller sensed its strong potential as an organ tune, and this new reading proves his hunch correct. After a brief rubato prelude, the tune settles into a shimmying I-VI-II-V groove spiked with darting, syncopated unison lines and, in the B section, another of Van Ruller's finely wrought melodic hooks. Once again, Van Ruller was bowled over by Bill Stewart's finesse: "The drums are somewhere in between a straight and a triplet feel. I don't know how he does it, but it's really him."

While Van Ruller relishes his recording trips to New York, he has no plans to relocate. Still, he's doing his fair share of globetrotting, playing across Europe and even making a recent appearance at the Kathmandu Jazz Festival ("Jazzmandu") in Nepal. (Might there be more jazz in Nepal than in large stretches of America?) With his crisp,

full-bodied sound and quick-witted musicianship, he'll be warmly welcomed wherever he goes.

David R. Adler Editor, Jazz Notes.

For more information see Jesse van Ruller's website:  
[www.jessevanruller.com](http://www.jessevanruller.com)