



Criss Cross Jazz 1232

Joel Weiskopf

change in my life

John Patitucci Brian Blade

CRISS 1232 CD

Made in Holland

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CHANGE IN MY LIFE JOEL WEISKOPF TRIO

1. **THERE'S BEEN A CHANGE
IN MY LIFE**
(J. Weiskopf) 5.41
2. **ENIGMA**
(J. Weiskopf) 7.42
3. **RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE AND JOY**
(J. Weiskopf) 6.42
4. **FIRST LOVE**
(J. Weiskopf) 6.01
5. **YOU ARE MY WAY,
MY TRUTH AND MY LIFE**
(J. Weiskopf) 5.50
6. **IRISH FOLK SONG**
(J. Weiskopf) 6.11
7. **THE BELIEVER**
(J. Weiskopf) 6.21
8. **SONG FOR MY GRANDMOTHER**
(J. Weiskopf) 6.40
9. **ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE**
(J. Kern) 6.33
10. **DAY OF REJOICING**
(J. Weiskopf) 5.56

JOEL WEISKOPF piano
JOHN PATITUCCI bass
BRIAN BLADE drums

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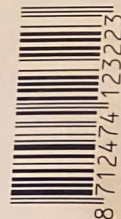
John Patitucci appears courtesy of Concord Records.

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Change In My Life

When **Joel Weiskopf** plays, writes, and records, it is the furthest thing from a rote exercise. His spiritual commitments run deep, informing everything down to the last eighth note. For evidence of the 40-year-old pianist's religious devotion, look no further than his album titles. His 1999 debut, **The Search** (Criss Cross 1174), was a largely standards-oriented trio session featuring bassist Peter Washington and drummer Billy Drummond. In 2001 he followed up with **New Beginning** (Criss Cross 1204), focusing on original material and expanding to a quintet. Now, with **Change In My Life**, Weiskopf scales back down to a trio and unveils another inventory of original compositions, along with one heavily reworked standard.

A graduate of New England Conservatory, Weiskopf has been paying dues in New York since 1985, gaining his first high-profile experience with the Woody Herman Orchestra. He appeared on John Swana and Joe Magnarelli's **Philly-New York Junction** (Criss Cross 1150), Andy Fusco's **Out of the Dark** (Criss Cross 1171), and five albums by his older brother, tenor saxophonist Walt Weiskopf. He has also worked with Jimmy Cobb, Gerry Mulligan, Don Braden, Greg Tardy, and more. These days he subs with the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra and keeps busy as a jazz educator and an active member of the Brooklyn Tabernacle church.

Through the years, Weiskopf has developed strong ties with the very best of musicians. His sidemen here, **John Patitucci** and **Brian Blade**,

have amassed two of the longest and most impressive resumes in modern music, not just jazz. When the great Wayne Shorter convened an acoustic band for the first time in decades for his 2001 tour, he knew he needed an extraordinary rhythm section. He chose Patitucci and Blade, both of whom helped make Shorter's concerts during that year truly unforgettable. (If you have any doubts, pick up a copy of *Footprints* live!)

"I had met Brian on a gig with Andy Fusco," recalls Weiskopf. "I almost couldn't believe what I was hearing. It was so beautiful so swinging and tasteful, the volume not too loud, it was everything I had dreamed of. He's really versatile, and I knew I didn't want someone who was limited to the bebop language. There's just no way it would've worked." The choice of Patitucci was a "no-brainer," according to Weiskopf. "I've always loved his playing, and our sensibilities are very similar. He's a virtuoso and can play in so many different styles and make it sound great. We also have a great personal relationship."

Once the format was chosen and the players were lined up, Weiskopf became inspired to write new material. "I didn't have anything, really, and the blessing was that I could compose specifically for this trio, for John and Brian. That wasn't the case with my quintet music, most of which was written 10 or 15 years beforehand. A lot of these new tunes came together about two months before the session."

Weiskopf's album title is something of an understatement. "I'm Jewish, and six years ago I became a believer in Jesus," he explains. "I had a spiritual awakening, and that's the change I'm referring to in the title. Now all my music is essentially about my relationship with the Lord. Some titles may seem more spiritual than others, but to me, basically, nothing is secular. Even when I don't have anything specifically spiritual motivating a song, to me, a beautiful song is spiritual in itself."

The leadoff track, ***There's Been a Change in My Life***, begins with an active, lilting melody over a brisk but floating 4/4 tempo. "There's a lot of tension and release in this piece," Weiskopf notes. "Most of the time there's at least one chord change per bar, and it goes all over the place harmonically." At the end of the form, however, two four-bar phrases introduce an element of harmonic stasis to set up the next chorus. "For 34 years I wondered why I was here," Weiskopf recalls. "I longed for peace and a sense of purpose and meaning to life. Through Christ, God has given me peace, joy, and that sense of purpose. That is what this song is about."

Enigma grew out of an exercise Weiskopf assigned his composition class at New Jersey City University. "It's based on a 12-tone row," he explains. At first the brooding tempo and modal vamp bring McCoy Tyner to mind, but harmonic shifts soon send the tune in a different direction. Patitucci solos first, then lays down a fat groove under the

piano solo. Winding down, Weiskopf and Blade trade twice over the 16-bar form. The strange hit on the upbeat that comes at the end of the melody makes for a logical ending.

"I had never composed anything with a second line feel before," Weiskopf says of ***Righteousness, Peace and Joy***. "It's a blues form but with different chord changes, definitely not your average blues." Two bars of five on the turnaround catch the ear off-guard, although the solo form stays in straight 4/4. Patitucci again solos first, rather athletically in a couple of spots; Weiskopf follows with a playful and adventurous turn.

First Love is a lyrical, expressive waltz that dates back to 1984. "Originally it had to do with a love relationship I was in," says Weiskopf. But the Bible talks about how, for the believer, Jesus is to be the first love. Because of that, I'd say the song has a kind of dual meaning."

You Are My Way, My Truth, and My Life opens with an ascending four-note motif that augurs a bright, swinging tempo. (Gerald Cleavers "Way Truth Life," from the album *Adjust*, also takes it's title from John 14:6.) "This one and the opener have a similar feel," Weiskopf observes. "They're both swing, but there's an open quality to the chord changes, and that affects the rhythm. So you don't get a real beboppy-sounding tune. This one is very major, and very triadic. The

opener is much more dense harmonically."

Although its title would seem to suggest otherwise, ***Irish Folk Song*** is an original composition written in 1998. Patitucci states the plaintive melody first before the leader takes it up, pushing the band into a driving 3/4 tempo. "When I listen to this it sounds like Ireland," Weiskopf muses. "I think John said the same thing. Although the song has no words, I wanted to convey the message that each moment of our lives is precious, and we never know when we'll take our last breath."

At an earlier point in production, ***The Believer*** was to have served as this album's title track. It is the third fast tempo of the session, but this time the harmonies are a shade darker, a deliberate move on Weiskopf's part: "I wanted to compose a song with darker colors to express that the believer's life is not necessarily an easy one. There are spiritual forces of darkness to be reckoned with." This is perhaps the most technically challenging of all the tunes. "It's so involved that I almost couldn't play it," Weiskopf admits. "I wrote it so close to the session that I didn't have time to practice it much. I wanted a lot of textures to come into play, little drum breaks here and there, chordal passages, melodic passages. I also wanted to get the bass involved, so I wrote those unison lines."

Song for My Grandmother eases into a ballad feel after a two-

minute rubato introduction. "I also wrote this for my composition class," Weiskopf recounts. "My guideline was a melody at least 12 bars long. This one turned out to be 15, which is unusual. I was playing it for my grandmother, my aunt and my father, and my aunt suggested the title afterward. The song has a melancholy but also a hopeful quality, and to me it represents times of blessing as well as sadness in Grandma's life. She is currently 99!"

Weiskopf's reharmonization of ***All the Things You Are*** began as an inside joke. "I used to play a gig at the Rainbow Room, and during breaks I'd amuse the band by playing this tune, moving the harmonies up a half-step under the original melody. The idea stuck because I heard some things that had potential. I finally sat down with it and picked new chords that I liked, as if I were the composer. I didn't stick to the half-step idea, although the first chord is an A and the tune is in Ab. Interestingly, the last chord of this arrangement is F minor, which happens to be the first chord in the standard version. I didn't plan it that way. It made me marvel at God's way of working."

The closing track, ***Day of Rejoicing***, is built around a samba feel in seven, with a rhythmic emphasis that fluctuates between four-plus-three and three-plus-four. "John is much more adept at playing Latin music than I am," Weiskopf concedes. "He was really concerned about getting this to groove despite its complexity." Another of Weiskopf's older compositions (written in 1997), this one harks back

to a time when Weiskopf was listening to a great deal of Brazilian music. "There's a joyful quality to samba that I wasn't hearing in American jazz," he recalls. "That definitely influenced compositions like this one."

A change in one's life can be disruptive, but just as often it can clarify and point the way forward. Joel Weiskopf's chops and imagination have taken him quite far. But it is his unique take on the spirituality of music a perspective earned after years of doubt and struggle that will continue to distinguish him in the field of modern jazz.

David R. Adler
Down Beat, All About Jazz
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