

Dr. Lonnie Smith

The Art Of Organizing

Peter Bernstein
Billy Drummond



Criss Cross Jazz 1318

Criss 1318 CD

THE ART OF ORGANIZING DR. LONNIE SMITH

1. **WHEN WE KISSED AT NIGHT**
(L. Smith) 8.43
2. **MY LITTLE SUEDE SHOES**
(C. Parker) 7.20
3. **THIS AIN'T RIGHT**
(L. Smith) 9.20
4. **POLKA DOTS AND MOONBEAMS**
(Burke-Van Heusen) 5.15
5. **SOFTLY AS IN A MORNING SUNRISE**
(Hammerstein-Romberg) 7.45
6. **TURNING POINT**
(L. Smith) 8.22
7. **NIGHT SONG**
(L. Smith) 11.12
8. **TOO DAMN HOT**
(L. Smith) 6.39

DR. LONNIE SMITH Hammond B3 organ
PETER BERNSTEIN guitar
BILLY DRUMMOND drums

Produced by Gerry Teekens
Recording Engineer: Max Bolleman
Mixing: Max Bolleman
Mastering: The Masters
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The Art of Organizing

In June 2009, for the fifth time, **Dr. Lonnie Smith** was voted Organist of the Year at the Jazz Journalists Association's annual Jazz Awards. On being congratulated some days later, Smith answered with a telling joke: "Oh, I was picking up the award for my twin brother, but I'll tell him thank you." In one sense, this was modesty, served up in the characteristic Smith style, a quip you would never see coming. But in another sense, the remark served to reinforce an undeniable truth: There is only one Dr. Lonnie Smith.

That same summer, over July 4th weekend, Smith celebrated his 67th birthday with a bravura three-day trio stint at Manhattan's *Smoke* jazz club. The guitarist at his side was **Peter Bernstein**, a protégé and colleague for many years now. There was groove, swing, soul and a sense of discovery underlying every moment of their 10 p.m. set on Independence Day, as fireworks popped just outside.

Smith has honed his mastery over the decades with a number of brilliant guitarists — perhaps most notably George Benson, on landmarks albums such as *It's Uptown* (1965) and *The George Benson Cookbook* (1966). Peter Bernstein is a worthy heir in the tradition, with remarkable finesse in the organ-trio setting. As both a leader and sideman, he has appeared on no fewer than 33 **Criss Cross** sessions, with the likes of Melvin Rhyne, Wycliffe Gordon, Sam Yahel, Brian Lynch and more. Among his

dates as a leader are **Somethin's Burnin'** (Criss 1079), **Signs of Life** (Criss 1095), **Earth Tones** (Criss 1151) and **Heart's Content** (Criss 1233).

On **The Art of Organizing**, Dr. Lonnie Smith's first and only **Criss Cross** recording thus far, we hear Bernstein and one of his key mentors at an earlier stage in their long history together. The session was done back in December 1993. Smith laughingly mentions Rip Van Winkle as he reflects on the album's long sleep in the vaults (thanks to a technical problem, now resolved in the digital era). "There's a few guys out there who can do a wonderful job, and Peter's definitely one of them," Smith adds, recounting their extensive experience together in the quartet of the great Lou Donaldson. "What I love about Peter's playing is that he's very creative and he has a beautiful touch. His ideas are really thoughtful. He's able to complement me very well — he fits like a glove. I've worked with some great guitar players, like George, Grant Green, Jimmy Ponder, Melvin Sparks. Peter has that feeling, he knows how to use his notes very carefully. From the old school. A lot of taste."

Joining them on drums is **Billy Drummond**, who, coincidentally enough, has also appeared on 33 previous **Criss Cross** sessions. In addition to his work with John Swana, Scott Wendholt, Walt Weiskopf, Tim Ries and many others, Drummond graced

Bernstein's **Brain Dance** (Criss 1130) and has also led three fine sessions of his own: **Native Colors** (Criss 1057), **The Gift** (Criss 1083) and **Dubai** (Criss 1120). "He cooks," Smith says of the in-demand Drummond. "He has a good drive and knows how to groove. That was no problem. We hit and he just went right along. It happened naturally, it was a great match."

When We Kissed At Night, by Smith, has the immediately accessible feel of a standard. "A song always tells me what it's about," Smith offers. "This is a song you just play right on the spot, and that's the way it was written. I think about the way Sammy Cahn and Richard Rodgers and all of them used to write years ago, you know, all of the old great writers. If you notice, it was always about the women. It was about beauty, and the beautiful things. So this is one of those type of songs — there's a young man with a young lady and he loves her and he's saying that: 'When we kissed at night.' He's speaking the melody."

My Little Suede Shoes is one of Charlie Parker's classics, a simpler line than is often associated with high bebop. Smith's treatment is essentially faithful to the calypso vibe of the original. "Oh for sure, love that tune, love that tune!" Smith enthuses. "I play it all the time when I go to a club." This take is drenched in blues feeling, with Bernstein leading off the solos and Smith working up to lightning-quick runs as Drummond maintains a

steady and solid pace.

About **This Ain't Right**, an original blues in F, Smith says: "Normally the melody tells me the title of a song. You see? The melody says it. It's speaking to a young lady." This is organ jazz of the classic kind: Bernstein leads off with a springing initial phrase; Smith sustains a dramatic chord under him for the first four bars, then releases with a staccato blast. And the band is off, cooking on all burners. Smith builds his statement with an expert touch, from concise phrases to searing double-time lines to roaring Leslie effects, winding down with a gutsy choice: a single two-note motif, repeated for two and a half choruses.

Polka Dots and Moonbeams prompts Smith to declare: "I could play ballads all night!" The organ's rich and mellow sustain is tailor-made for the idiom, and Smith is particularly strong and expressive here. "It's a beautiful ballad, and I haven't played it in a pretty good while," he says. "I love those kinds of tunes — it just speaks for itself. You really don't have to do anything." Bernstein takes the bridge melody and comps with consummate taste under Smith's affecting solo.

Smith handles **Softly, As In a Morning Sunrise**, a widely recorded standard by Romberg and Hammerstein, as a crisply uptempo burner, with Drummond patiently keeping to brushes.

"That was the idea, I wanted the brushes, with that tempo," Smith recalls, adding, "I had no idea I played it that fast. I'm serious, I heard it back and I was surprised. I said, No I didn't! "But I did!" Bernstein plays the bridge melody and skates across the time during his solo with patience and poise. Smith takes over in a seamless transition and keeps the two-feel churning, switching timbres as he goes and soaking every phrase in the blues.

Turning Point is a Smith classic, the title track of a 1969 album featuring Lee Morgan, Julian Priester and Bennie Maupin. The tune remains in Smith's trio book to this day. There's a dark, harmonically ambiguous mood underlying the bright tempo. The jumpy melody of the A section leads to a more legato diminished pattern in the B's. "Then it jumps right out at you again, you know," says Smith. "To me, it's telling a story, and in that little interlude there it raises questions. It has that eyebrow of surprise." Bernstein delves in first with his clean, pointed articulation, and Smith builds intensity with whirring, roaring waves of sound from his Leslie rotating speaker. Drummond's Afro-Latin feel is effortlessly in the pocket.

Night Song is a deliciously slow shuffle, with darkly hued modal blues harmonies. "I wasn't thinking about nighttime when I wrote it!" Smith confides. The song first appeared on his 1991 album *The Turbanator*, with Jimmy Ponder on guitar. "It's a guitar song to

me, for sure," Smith says, and indeed, Bernstein sings beautifully over the changes, displaying a gift for focused phrasing and powerful tone production that has only grown over the years. "I wrote the song long ago," Smith continues, "and I could imagine a couple of people playing it. In my head I definitely heard Kenny Burrell, or Grant Green. But I never did mention it to them."

Too Damn Hot is an original (not to be confused with the Cole Porter tune of the same name) that went on to become the title track of a Smith release in 2004. Interestingly, the tempo of this 1993 take is a bit faster. One might hear a hint of "*Gone With the Wind*" in the bridge melody. "It has that classic feel," says Smith. "It sounds like a standard tune right off. You can hum it, like they used to write songs. Again, it tells you the title. 'Too ... Damn ... Hot!' See how it just tells you the words? It just speaks out at me." Bernstein leads off with a polished, swinging turn, and the doctor answers, effectively as always.

Wearing a distinctive smile when he plays, Smith has a way of looking out at an audience with complete openness — no hindrances, no external blocks, just pure music. He conveys a sense of mutual delight in the moment, a sense that everyone, players and listeners alike, are in it together. More visibly than most, he feeds off the excitement and good will of the public. After all, without the listener there to receive what Smith is giving,

the circuit is incomplete. Smith is acutely aware of this, but of course he has an elliptical way of saying so. "Great set," I told him after he finished for the night at Smoke. "It's your fault," he replied.

David R. Adler

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