

- 1 Try Another Day 5:12
- 2 A Thoughtful Attempt 6:08
- 3 Convergence 7:16
- 4 You Know I Love You 6:24
- 5 You'll Know When You See Her 5:22
- 6 Familiar Places 6:36
- 7 Left Behind 6:36
- 8 Without You—No Me (To Dizzy) 7:34
- 9 A Clear Path 7:09

All compositions by Matt Garrison, published by VetteCor Music ASCAP
 Except "Without You—No Me (To Dizzy)" by Jimmy Heath, arranged by Matt Garrison
 "You Know I Love You" by Michael Dease, Dease Clef Music ASCAP

Personnel

Matt Garrison—tenor and baritone saxophone
Bruce Harris—trumpet
Claudio Roditi—trumpet / flugelhorn
Thomas Barber—flugelhorn
Michael Dease—trombone
Sharel Cassity—flute
Don Braden—alto flute
Mark Whitfield—guitar
Zaccai Curtis—piano and fender rhodes
Luques Curtis—bass
Rodney Green—drums



D Clef
Records

Matt Garrison

Familiar Places featuring Claudio Roditi

D Clef Records DCR152

Matt Garrison

FEATURING
 CLAUDIO RODITI **Familiar Places**



We can start by saying that this is the debut recording from Matt Garrison, a fine 30-year-old tenor saxophonist based in Yonkers, just outside New York. But *Familiar Places* is more than just a horn player's manifesto — it's a disc that highlights Garrison's refined sensibility as an arranger and composer. There is fiery solo virtuosity from all involved, but that's not the whole show. Above all, this is music that reveals the spark of teamwork and crafty ensemble interplay, not to mention the dividends that come from patient, sound decision-making.

"I've written a lot of songs over the years, waiting to be played," says Garrison. "Since I got out of school [at the Purchase Conservatory of Music], I've always been the sideman, playing other people's music. It was a long time coming that I put together a group and a selection of my own music. Mike Dease and I met, we became friends, and he was the one who put it in my ear to do this album."

Dease went on to produce this session, and being familiar with Garrison's skilled pen, he nudged the saxophonist toward a more elaborate arranging concept. Garrison's own compass was pointing that way as well. "I was hearing more things, and a lot of it stems from me wanting to give the listener different colors at different times and more surprises. Early on, I remember listening to a Stevie Wonder tune, and by the end of the song the whole drive and color of the song was different from the beginning. Different instruments, different things brought out in the mix. That's where a lot of my inspiration comes from — just being really curious about sound."

To bring these ideas to life, Garrison chose from among today's finest players, beginning with Dease himself (hear the producer's deft, charging trombone solo on "You'll Know When You See Her"). Of Zaccai and Luques Curtis, on piano and bass respectively, Garrison enthuses: "I was looking for people who had camaraderie going in, and who better than to get two brothers who play together all the time? They're amazing, and you know they're going to bounce off each other and have mutual ideas for the music."

Seeing as Garrison believes "the drums are always the most important aspect of the band," he did not choose the accomplished Rodney Green by accident. "Rodney can just do anything, it seems. He can do the swing thing, the modern vibe — he's just so solid and extremely musical." Another anchoring presence, trumpeter Bruce Harris, is "probably my longest musical associate," Garrison declares. "I met him in college in 1999 and we used to have jam sessions in our apartments on the weekends. I think the first time together we played 'Confirmation,' and it was amazing how we blended and phrased so similarly. I grew up in upstate New York and he's from the Bronx, but we have these identical tastes, and he's been a huge influence in my upbringing."

Matt Garrison

Familiar Places also benefits from three sterling guest slots by trumpet-flugelhorn master Claudio Roditi; two tight guitar contributions, one acoustic and one electric, by the renowned Mark Whitfield; and two tracks featuring the rich and uncommon texture of flute (Sharel Cassity), alto flute (Don Braden) and flugelhorn (Thomas Barber). Garrison further enhances the second of these, "Left Behind," with his choice of baritone sax, the newest arrow in his quiver. He calls the ballad "deceptively gloomy, because by the end of the form, a feeling of perseverance occurs."

Familiar Places

Elsewhere, Garrison drinks from the well of modern modal blues ("Try Another Day"), funk and boogaloo ("A Clear Path"), bossa nova and Latin ("A Thoughtful Attempt"), odd meters ("Convergence") and points beyond. The title track happens to be his very first composition, "Familiar Places," inspired by "those special spots in the world that make you feel at ease and completely comfortable." Ironically, the piece is rather unfamiliar in terms of harmonic and stylistic outline, a departure on an already

varied playlist. Dease, for his part, contributes the spacious, Rhodes-inflected "You Know I Love You," and Garrison offers the first-ever small-group arrangement of Jimmy Heath's big band piece "Without You, No Me." On the latter, note the deftly handled transitions from Latin to swing, which speak well of the band's effortless rapport.

Last but not at all least, there is Garrison the saxophone soloist to consider. His tone is warm and even, his technique agile yet unhurried, his ideas steeped in the tradition but mindful of the road less traveled. "I think I steer toward the underdogs," Garrison says. "For instance, Tina Brooks is one of my favorite tenor players ever. Content-wise, my biggest influences include Hank Mobley, the first guy who inspired me to start writing stuff down. Stan Getz, certainly, as far as melody goes, and a non-lick approach to improvising — it always sounded to me like he was playing completely by ear. And then Dexter, Sonny Stitt, Jimmy Heath, Wayne Shorter and Joe Henderson — those are the big ones. But I never set out to mimic anyone's sound. It was always about trying to learn the language."

He's learned it, for sure. But not satisfied to stop there, he's honed a personal approach to orchestration, a way of making a band his instrument as well. That's what gives *Familiar Places* its distinctive aura. Here's hoping it's the first release of many.

Notes by **DAVID R. ADLER** New York, January 2010