

Criss 1338 CD

FIRST IN MIND MIKE MORENO

MIKE MORENO guitar
AARON PARKS piano, Fender Rhodes
MATT BREWER bass
KENDRICK SCOTT drums

1. **FIRST IN MIND**
(M. Moreno) 7.51
2. **SOUL DANCE**
(J. Redman) 8.50
3. **AIREGIN**
(S. Rollins) 5.46
4. **BY MYSELF**
(J. Mease) 6.05
5. **BUT BEAUTIFUL**
(J. Van Heusen) 8.28
6. **MILAGRE DOS PEIXES**
(MIRACLE OF THE FISHES)
(M. Nascimento) 7.13
7. **A FLOR E O ESPINHO**
(THE FLOWER AND THE THORN)
(N. Cavaquinho) 7.31
8. **IN A SILENT WAY**
(J. Zawinul) 8.30
9. **MANTRA # 5**
(J. Redman) 5.27

TOTAL TIME: 66.16

Produced by Gerry Teekens
Recording Engineer: Michael Marciano
Mixing: Max Bolleman
Mastering: The Masters
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mike moreno first in mind
AARON PARKS MATT BREWER KENDRICK SCOTT



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First In Mind

After a memorable sideman appearance on Jimmy Greene's 2007 album **Gifts and Givers** [Criss 1295], **Mike Moreno** debuted as a **Criss Cross** leader in 2008 with the quartet date **Third Wish** [Criss 1303]. At that point he was already widely viewed as one of the best jazz guitarists to emerge in the last decade. On **First In Mind**, his strong follow-up, Moreno returns with another quartet lineup and focuses mainly on work by other composers. There's no mistaking his technical and theoretical command, but just as crucial is Mike's wide array of electric and acoustic timbres, not to mention his passion for music in all its diversity: jazz from across the eras, contemporary singer-songwriters, Brazilian music and more.

"I've been playing a lot of this music on trio gigs," Mike says of the songs on **First In Mind**. "But at this point I'm still not interested in doing a trio record. I'm getting there. But I just love the sound of piano and guitar together. Especially with **Aaron Parks** — there's a nice give and take between the two of us. We really understand each other at this point." Mike can be heard on *Invisible Cinema*, Parks's 2008 debut for Blue Note. Parks made his first **Criss Cross** appearance in 2010, as a sideman on altoist Will Vinson's **Stockholm Syndrome** [Criss 1330].

"I started playing with [bassist] **Matt Brewer** more recently, in another project of mine with vibraphone," Moreno continues. "He was the first guy I thought of to record my new original music, but I also wanted **First In Mind** to have that element: a more active bass approach, more broken up rhythmically, maybe not so traditional an approach to the music." Born

in Oklahoma and raised largely in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Brewer has established himself as a first-call player in New York via high-profile gigs with Greg Osby, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Jeff "Tain" Watts and more.

Kendrick Scott, a friend and schoolmate of Moreno's from Houston, Texas, is now one of the world's most in-demand drummers, not to mention leader of the 2009 **Criss Cross** session **Reverence** [Criss 1316]. Scott also happens to be the proprietor of World Culture, an artist-run label and collective that released Moreno's *Between the Lines* in 2008 (and plans to release a follow-up by Mike in the near future). "There are tunes on **First In Mind** where I definitely wanted that big, wide beat you can get from Kendrick," Moreno says. "The music still has that swinging element, even though it isn't totally straightahead."

Mike's title cut, **First In Mind**, is the lone original piece, and it dates back to his student days at the New School Jazz and Contemporary Music Program. "I walked into a practice room and played the first three chords of that tune. I thought to myself, 'I'm just going to play anything.' And those were the first three chords that came out: those voicings, with the melody, everything. The rest of the tune came from there. I called it 'First In Mind' because that's literally what it was." Though Moreno stayed true to his original intent, he explains, "I changed some of the rhythms, especially at the beginning, and I put an intro on it. I never could find a place for this tune sonically on my past two records, even though I always liked it. So I always had it in my reserve."

Soul Dance is a driving jazz waltz from Wish, Joshua Redman's classic 1993 disc with Pat Metheny, Charlie Haden and Billy Higgins. Here's an occasion for Moreno to embrace the trio setting and even switch to acoustic guitar — a 1953 Gibson LG-2 he acquired while playing with vocalist Lizz Wright. "I haven't been able to capture the trio sound I want in the studio with electric guitar — but with acoustic guitar, I feel like I've got it," Mike says. "I started to hear this tune that way. The melody has this almost desperado vibe, really soulful." It's worth noting that Wish was Moreno's first encounter with the playing of Pat Metheny — and little did the 15-year-old guitar student know he'd tour one day with Josh Redman's Elastic Band. "I'd met Josh when I was 16 and he signed my copy of Wish, which has always held a special place with me. It was the first time I heard these kinds of original compositions, which were more modern but still had that traditional element. So it was really great to get to play with him all those years later."

Sonny Rollins' **Airegin** is a staple of post-bop repertoire, ever since its unfurling on Miles Davis' Bags Groove in the mid-'50s. Moreno offers it with a twist, comparing it to his treatment of Joe Henderson's Isotope on **Third Wish**. "The intro is in 5/4, loosely based on the original intro with the triplet motif. I came up with the arrangement before a duo gig with [drummer] Rodney Green at Smalls. I thought it would be cool to do something a little rhythmic with it. So we do a seven-bar first ending instead of eight bars — in other words, we skip a bar. And there's this hemiola effect, these hits going on under the melody. Then it has the 5/4 sendoffs for each solo. I wanted something straightahead, fast and swinging, a really recognizable tune but slightly changed."

By Myself is not to be confused with the standard by Arthur Schwartz and Howard Dietz. In fact, it's a creation of Moreno's fellow Houstonian Josh Mease. Mike explains: "Josh is also a guitarist, a couple of years younger than me, and after I left for New York I kept hearing about him. He came to the New School and was playing jazz, sounding really good, but after about a year he started writing rock or pop songs, getting really serious about it. More recently, [vocalist] Gretchen Parlato and others have started recording his music. This particular song is amazingly melodic and it always stuck with me." Mease's brooding lyrics might have had something to do with it. On the main descending theme Mease sings: "They all know the way to heaven/they all know the way to heaven/we don't know which way is up/when we go down there, there ... we'll ... stay ... always." About his arrangement, Mike comments: "Really there was nothing I wanted to change, except our tempo is a little faster. It reminds me a bit of Aaron Parks's writing, with these inverted triads moving in really cool ways, so I thought it would be perfect for Aaron to play."

But Beautiful, a lovely ballad feature, offers some simple harmonic surprises. "I like to take tunes that are beautiful by themselves and just change them slightly," Mike says. "These were very natural substitutions that just came to me after playing the tune. It was never anything I was really trying to do. I think it made the tune a little more my own, and a little more accessible to solo over. I put a little tag at the very end but I left the melody basically the same. I've kind of re-fallen in love with the tune. I just started playing it again recently and can't stop. I'm addicted."

Milton Nascimento's *Milagre Dos Peixes* ("Miracle Of the Fishes") is a gorgeous piece best known to jazzers from Wayne Shorter's 1974 LP *Native Dancer*. It's also one of two tracks on *First In Mind* that explicitly reveals Moreno's growing involvement in Brazilian music. "For about the last three years it's been a huge influence on me," he says, mentioning frequent work with bassist Leonardo Cioglia, as well as performances in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, Belo Horizonte, Ouro Preto, Manaus and elsewhere. "This is a tune everybody would talk about but no one was really playing," he continues. "I played it with Leonardo's band, but here I took more liberties with the form. We start right in the middle of the tune, because I feel it's a stronger entrance if you don't have the power of the vocals. I also came up with a new solo form. This way it's longer and has more chance to grow. Then, on the way out, we play it straight down."

Nelson Cavaquinho's *A Flor E O Espinho* ("The Flower and the Thorn") continues the album's Brazilian sub-narrative. "The first time I went to Brazil, to play the Amazonas Festival in Manaus, a girl there bought one of my CDs. The next morning I got an email from her saying the CD was cracked. So she came by the festival again and brought me a CD of the great singer

Elizeth Cardoso, which is from before bossa nova, really old-school. I thought, 'Wow, I sold this girl a cracked CD and she brought me a present.' Well, that CD is now one of my favorites in the world. And this song is from there. I fell in love with it, learned it, and I started displacing the rhythms until one day I realized I was playing it in five. I love the lyric too: It's telling someone off, saying, 'Get out of my way, I made the mistake of being with you,

yesterday I was a flower in your heart and today I'm a thorn.' A lot of Brazilian songs are about heartbreak, ex-lovers, longing for someone. After I learned Portuguese I was always surprised how sad some of the songs were, even if they sounded upbeat."

With Joe Zawinul's *In A Silent Way*, the title track of Miles Davis's epoch-making 1969 album, Moreno and the band do some historical digging: They revive Zawinul's original chord changes, which can be heard in a long-suppressed Miles rehearsal outtake, but also on Zawinul's pivotal 1971 album, *Zawinul*. There the composer gives his own account of the song: "Impressions of Joe Zawinul's days as a shepherd boy in Austria." Perhaps there are echoes of that in the spacious vibe of Mike's opening, although the piece ultimately slips into tempo and becomes, in effect, a new piece. "We mixed both approaches together," Moreno remarks, "which was really Aaron's idea. I thought we'd just play the tune in time, but Aaron started it more rubato. What you hear is us figuring it out on the spot. There's one point where nobody knows what's happening, and then Aaron starts playing the changes and we hear it. That was not planned."

Arriving full-circle, Moreno closes with *Mantra #5* from Joshua Redman's 2007 album *Back East*. On the original, Redman and Chris Cheek both play soprano sax against the rhythmic accompaniment of bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Ali Jackson. "It's more of a hand-drum feel, really sparse, no chords," says Mike. "It's not as backbeat-driven, but again, we never really spoke about it. It just turned into this jam vibe, especially with

Aaron on Rhodes.” In fact, Moreno’s version might be closer to the one he played regularly on the road with Redman. “The timing was a coincidence,” Mike remarks. “I’d just seen Josh and he asked me to sit in with his trio at the Jazz Standard. He asked me what I wanted to play, and I said ***Soul Dance*** and ***Mantra #5*** — those were two I thought we could do on the spot. They were so fun that I decided to include them here.”

And that’s Mike Moreno: trusting his instincts, hashing out ideas in the moment and over the long haul, taking inspiration from every available source or tradition, in jazz and beyond. And what better than the guitar, that most versatile of instruments, to paint such a vivid landscape? But even as Moreno casts the widest of stylistic nets, he never loses sight of his singular identity as an artist.

David R. Adler
New York, April 2011