

Raffaele Califano
Horizontal Dialogues

In choosing for this album the title *Horizontal Dialogues*, Rome-based drummer and composer Raffaele Califano had more than one meaning in mind. There's the dialogue among equals that makes for the most inspired music, of course. But there's also simple human empathy and connection, "a dialogue among people of all backgrounds," as Califano puts it. "Our voices as people are like musical notes. The music manages to bring together different voices in harmony. It's something that doesn't always happen, and I think there is an increasing need that it happens."

Califano has a long history of entering dialogues, nourishing connections — in his extensive conservatory training and his studies with the likes of Bob Moses, Francisco Mela, Gary Chaffee, Skip Hadden and Portinho; in his intermittent work as a public school music teacher; and not least in his work on records or onstage with such colleagues as Eddy Palermo, Toninho Horta, Paolo Di Sabatino, Fabrizio Bosso and many more.

On this inspired recording we hear a quartet made up mainly of Italian players. But as Califano intended, there's a horizontal dialogue: from across the ocean comes American tenor saxophonist Seamus Blake, acclaimed soloist with the Mingus Big Band, Gonzalo Rubalcaba and many others, a prized player for many years on the New York and international scene. "The thought of dialogue led me to meet the great Seamus Blake," Califano says, "and I knew that despite living in such distant cities, we would be able to communicate and exchange experiences."

The dialogue goes even deeper thanks to the strong bond between Califano and his band mates. Pianist Antonio Magli, the drummer says, "is a great musician and a beautiful person. We've worked together for a few years, especially live." Magli also appeared on Califano's 2015 debut as a leader, *Brush Up*. Bassist Francesco Pierotti met Califano recently at Santa Cecilia Conservatory while the two were doing master classes together. "I called him to play bass for one of my gigs. From there was born the friendship, and my invitation to play on this new record. He was very happy to accept."

In the sunny harmony and upbeat 7/4 gait of "A Beetle Romantic," Califano and the band venture an optimistic and unusual opener, one that Blake can relax into melodically before soloing with great feeling and fervor. Magli's chordal pads on the Roland XP-50 keyboard broaden the tune's sonic spectrum and give it a modern feel. There's a music video accompanying this track that can be found online; directed by Ari Takahashi, it shows Califano in the throes of composition as he goes about his daily life. In one sequence he's lying flat at rest on a rooftop in bright daylight, when his young daughter comes to show him a drawing of a beetle — a ladybug, more precisely. They then lie together imagining the creature in the shapes of the clouds above them. The intimate family moment helps Califano bring the piece to fruition.

Blake is in fine form again on "Baron and Pres," wringing expression from the legato melody before letting loose over the solidly funky groove. The tune is named for Charles Mingus and Lester Young ("Baron" was Mingus's bandleader handle back in the '40s on the West Coast). On "Damiani Tres Duo" the pace slows and the elegant harmony shines as the group highlights another facet of its sound. This title is a reference to Paolo Damiani, one of Califano's composition teachers. "It's the development of a study I was doing long ago," the

drummer says. “Tres Duo means that I forced myself to compose always using a sequence of three and two notes with rhythmic variations.”

Califano’s arrangement of “Tune Up,” the Miles Davis classic from 1953, sounds quite unlike the simple sequence of II-V-I progressions that defines the original version. “I’ve totally changed the harmony and form,” he explains, “and I left the original melody but I stretched out the line. In all the tunes, in fact, I’ve adopted a harmonic system other than functional — it’s been my biggest effort in recent years. I try to use different non-functional harmonic systems, more chromatic, modal and contemporary. And sometimes I use the functional system in particular areas of a tune, depending on what I want to achieve.”

The ballad “New Life” is inspired by Wayne Shorter and features Blake again to great effect. “I was doing an analysis of Shorter’s compositions and came to the idea to write this tune,” Califano recalls. “I try in my compositions to convey something that attracts my attention, my spirit. For this the harmonies have a specific way of being, designed to guide this musical tale.”

From here onward, *Horizontal Dialogues* moves in a more groove-oriented direction, though mellow at first with “Week Work.” There are intriguing formal twists and phrase-lengths that make the soloist’s job more challenging, and yet the legato feel of main melody couldn’t be more natural and flowing. With “Out of the Loop” the Roland keyboard returns, much more boldly than on the opener, this time replacing acoustic piano altogether and infusing the piece with layers of spacey sounds and effects. This aesthetic is even more pronounced on the concluding “Onin,” with Pierotti laying out and Magli taking on the bass role with keyboard. The title is a mashing together of “on” and “in,” as Califano elaborates: “It means up and inside and around the time. It’s the rhythmic pulse that makes a play on the concept of the beat. Sometimes the pulse is on, sometimes it’s in, and the two alternate continuously.”

The electric element is something that Califano intends to pursue further, perhaps on his next recording. And so the dialogues will continue, developing new offshoots, while the core of Califano’s musical identity will no doubt grow even deeper.

David R. Adler
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