



Alex Sipiagin

Generations

Dedicated to
Woody Shaw

Adam Rogers
Boris Kozlov
Antonio Sanchez



Criss Cross Jazz 1325

GENERATIONS

DEDICATED TO WOODY SHAW

ALEX SIPIAGIN

1. **GREENWOOD I**
(A. Sipiagin) 8.43
2. **OBSEQUIOUS**
(L. Young) 5.49
3. **CASSANDRANITE**
(W. Shaw) 5.51
4. **BEYOND ALL LIMITS**
(W. Shaw) 7.34
5. **WINDY BAHN**
(A. Sipiagin) 8.36
6. **KATRINA BALLERINA**
(W. Shaw) 7.13
7. **CHANCE**
(A. Sipiagin) 7.13
8. **BLUES FOR WOOD**
(W. Shaw-R. Mathews) 8.13
9. **GREENWOOD II**
(A. Sipiagin) 8.09

TOTAL TIME: 67.57

ALEX SIPIAGIN trumpet, fluegelhorn
ADAM ROGERS guitar
BORIS KOSLOV bass
ANTONIO SANCHEZ drums

Produced by Gerry Teekens
Recording Engineer: Michael Marciano
Mixing: Max Bolleman
Mastering: The Masters
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Generations - *Dedicated to Woody Shaw*

Anyone who has heard **Alex Sipiagin**'s work with Dave Holland, Michael Brecker, the Mingus Big Band and more can attest that he is one of the world's leading jazz trumpeters. Add to that Sipiagin's seven previous albums as a leader for **Criss Cross** and the case is only stronger. But like every authoritative jazz musician of today, Sipiagin is part of a historical chain, building on the legacy and vocabulary of great artists who came before. One such artist is Woody Shaw, who set the highest of standards despite being widely overlooked in his day and dying tragically in 1989, at age 45.

"Woody Shaw is my favorite trumpet player, my inspiration since I was studying in Russia," Sipiagin declares. "The first time I heard him, around 1985, we had a limited amount of music in Russia at the time, and our teacher had tapes so I got copies. I was completely blown away. Even now, many years later, every time I listen to Woody I always find something new and inspiring — a strong individual style and concept of playing. And I still feel a little weird about playing his music because I always think, man, I'm not deserving yet."

There isn't enough space here to assess Woody Shaw's impact. But just consider, in addition to his output as a leader, his formative experiences with Eric Dolphy, Horace Silver, Max Roach, Art Blakey, Chick Corea, Andrew Hill, Larry Young, McCoy Tyner, Jackie McLean and more. An imposing history to say the least, and yet Sipiagin's homage, **Generations: Dedicated to Woody Shaw**, rises to the level that history demands of it. More than that, it does Shaw the honor of situating him in a new context, so that we hear his work sparking the imaginations of younger players. "I wanted my own interpretation

of Woody's music," says Sipiagin. "With my instrumentation, using guitar, which is completely different from his. I took his tunes and changed them a bit, not just to change them but because that's how I hear them."

As it happens, Woody Shaw appeared once on the **Criss Cross** label. The record was **Introducing Kenny Garrett** [Criss 1014] back in 1985, the very year of Sipiagin's Shaw conversion. On drums was the late Tony Reedus, a frequent Shaw associate and a **Criss Cross** regular. On piano was Mulgrew Miller, another Shaw alum, who has recently shared the stage with Sipiagin in the Dave Holland Sextet and even put his stamp on Sipiagin's previous **Criss Cross** album **Mirages** [Criss 1311]. So in a sense, Sipiagin's career path has drawn him ever deeper into Shaw's orbit.

For **Generations**, Sipiagin chose a band of peers — guitarist **Adam Rogers**, bassist **Boris Kozlov**, drummer **Antonio Sanchez** — who speak a highly evolved musical language, informed by Shaw and other greats but also by the shared experiences of the recent past. At one point, all four were members of the Michael Brecker Sextet and Quindectet, and their names crop up more than once in Sipiagin's leader discography, on discs including **Hindsight** [Criss 1220], **Mirrors** [Criss 1236] and **Returning** [Criss 1270]. Rogers is of course a notable **Criss Cross** leader in his own right, with five titles to his credit.

"Boris I know from 1982," Sipiagin remarks. "We have a very long relationship, studying at the same college and playing in the same bands in Russia. We finally moved to the U.S. in 1990 and our careers kind of developed the same

way. Adam was one of the guitarists in the Gil Evans Orchestra at Sweet Basil, my first steady gig in the U.S., and he became one of the very important people in my life. Antonio I met during the Michael Brecker project and we became good friends. With these guys, I don't have to explain anything. They know what we're all doing."

There is no relation, Sipiagin confirms, between the original opening track **Greenwood** and Shaw's 1977 tune *Rosewood*. Rather, Sipiagin's melody comes from a trumpet phrase that occurs in *The Greene Street Caper*, from Shaw's 1981 album *United* (featuring Reedus and Mulgrew Miller). Specifically, it's the stop-time pickup into Shaw's solo, a beautifully enigmatic two-bar line that Sipiagin transforms into the basis of a wholly new piece. Rogers opens with a bass figure, Kozlov doubles it, and a mysterious 13-beat cycle kicks in to set up the melody. The time shifts to 4/4 swing in various startling permutations as the solos unfold. Given the burning result, it's understandable that Sipiagin should close the date with an alternate take of **Greenwood**, this one "with a completely different energy, especially from the rhythm section."

Obsequious is a Larry Young composition that the late organist recorded on piano (a rarity) in 1965. Woody Shaw led the date, but the music didn't see release until 1983 as *In the Beginning*. It was later reissued as the Muse CD *Cassandranite*, which is now very hard to find despite being a thrilling example of explosive mid-'60s postbop. "Honestly, at first I thought Woody wrote this tune because it's a typical Woody Shaw-ish melody," says Sipiagin. Rogers, on an overdubbed track, doubles the challenging line with the trumpet — a

strategy the group employs on much of **Generations**. "It's a quartet recording," Sipiagin explains, "but at the same time I definitely heard another voice. So we decided to record the main track and then overdub the melodies." Sipiagin also opted not to replicate the uptempo swing of the original version. Instead, he crafted a slower, heavily syncopated main groove and added rests in between the phrases. "I purposely separated the solo section groove from the head, so it's two different things," he adds. "The solos have a different vibe but the parts connect at the same time."

Cassandranite, the title track of the aforementioned Muse CD, is a midtempo burner by Shaw (it featured Larry Young again on piano). "This is the only tune I didn't want to touch," Sipiagin admits. "I didn't want to change anything, except that with my instrumentation it already sounds different, with guitar and the way Antonio plays drums. I decided to leave it, except that we opened up the solo section and stayed on one harmony, an open vamp for a while." The take is admirably to the point, with solos that start in a looser feel and ease into walking swing. Sipiagin leads off, followed by Rogers and an especially nimble Kozlov.

Shaw's **Beyond All Limits** appears, as does Shaw himself, on Larry Young's classic 1965 Blue Note album *Unity*. Sipiagin's approach here is radical. The *Unity* version is furiously fast, an all-out swinger, and Shaw's elegant, leaping motifs are practically a blur. Sipiagin treats the theme like a tone row or etude, in an introduction with just trumpet and guitar. "Sometimes it's nice to hear the tune," he offers. "I always imagined this at a slower tempo where you hear

every harmony, every change. The duo opening we decided on right at the session — it was actually Adam's suggestion." Sanchez and Kozlov lay down a flowing quasi-Brazilian rhythm but detour briefly into swing during the guitar solo. "I changed the form slightly," Sipiagin interjects. "I added one more bar during the bridge so this way you can feel the separation between the parts a lot more."

Of the original *Windy Bahn*, Sipiagin recalls: "This melody came up during the last tour I did in Germany, where we were driving 250 miles an hour [laughs] on the German highway. It was windy like crazy. I got my computer out and wrote down these little sketches, came back home and just finished it. I was definitely thinking about Woody's music when I wrote this, especially when you look at the bridge." The agitated, irregular theme gives way to charged swing, both implied and overt, as all band members make statements in turn. "I always like to create different solo sections for each player," Sipiagin says, noting the tune's constantly shifting environment.

Katrina Ballerina, a bittersweet waltz originally heard on Shaw's *United*, falls naturally into 5/4 in this version, although Sipiagin's tempo is slower than Shaw's. "My Dave Holland influence," Sipiagin laughs. "Once you start playing with Dave, with all those odd meters, it becomes such a natural thing. You open your mind completely and you hear many things this way." Following Rogers's virtuosic choruses, Sipiagin has his say on flugelhorn — the one and only time on the album — and goads Rogers into some lively and inventive sparring over the pedal-vamp outro. Sanchez is particularly crisp as the band

feels its way toward a spontaneous ending.

Sipiagin's *Chance* is based on the changes to Cole Porter's *What Is This Thing Called Love*, but it's inspired by one version in particular: track three from Shaw's *United*. "It's my very favorite Woody Shaw solo," Sipiagin announces. "When I was a student I transcribed it and I still know every note from memory. Basically I wrote my own head, and didn't use his phrasing, but my phrasing inspired by him." This time there is no guitar overdub; both the harmonized A and unison B sections are thoroughly evocative of Shaw's wide-interval concepts and hard-swinging, tightrope aesthetic. Kozlov shades the harmony with tension-building pedal points as Rogers and Sipiagin sculpt their solos, followed by a bout of eights with Sanchez.

Blues for Wood, co-written by Shaw and the late pianist Ronnie Mathews, is the closing track from *United* and the penultimate track here. After Kozlov's broad-toned unaccompanied intro the piece takes a wickedly polyrhythmic turn. "It's basically a pattern of quarter-note triplets which repeats on top of the eighth notes," Sipiagin remarks, "and everything works together like a clock. That was the idea, movement underneath the very simple melody." The final four bars revert to straight bluesy swing, medium-slow — the tempo that remains in place for the solos — although Kozlov and Rogers loop the descending triplet pattern while Sanchez takes the final turn.

Tribute albums can be rote affairs, dry rehashes of old material, but Sipiagin's *Generations* avoids this altogether. For one thing, it shines a light on a

great but unjustly neglected figure (can anyone argue that Shaw's tunes are overplayed, his legacy overemphasized)? More important, it foregrounds Sipiagin's artistry and individualism as well, telling us something about the reception and evolution of ideas over the course of decades. As a sequence of 10 fulfilling tracks, **Generations** stands on its own. But in some intangible way, Sipiagin has become a part of Shaw's story.

David R. Adler

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(www.adlermusic.com)