



- 1 Poinciana, what time is it? 6:25 (Nat Simon) (Dde to Ahmad Jamal)
 - 2 Brasil Bela 4:00 (Tobias Gebb) Yummyhouse Records ASCAP
 - 3 The Barnyard 4:21 (Tobias Gebb) - Yummyhouse Records ASCAP
 - 4 Star-Crossed Lovers 5:08 (Billy Strayhorn)
 - 5 Autumn Serenade 4:31 (Peter DeRose) -
 - 6 Cute 3:07 (Neal Hefti)
 - 7 Wil'O The Wisp 5:28 (M. De Falla)
 - 8 What A Little Moonlight Can Do 3:40 (Harry Woods)
 - 9 Two By Two 4:40 (Tobias Gebb) Yummyhouse Records ASCAP
 - 10 How Deep is the Ocean 5:02 (Irving Berlin)
 - 11 The Monument (Soldiers and Sailors) 6:14 (Tobias Gebb) - Yummyhouse Records ASCAP
 - 12 And I Love Her 4:09 (Lennon/McCartney)
- Total Time 56:45

all arrangements and compositions by Tobias Gebb © 2008 Yummyhouse Records - track 10-bass line by Eldad Zvulun
 Tobias Gebb - drummer, composer, arranger - Neal Miner - Bass - Eldad Zvulun - Piano
 special guests - Joel Frahm - Tenor Saxophone (tracks 3, 5, 8, and 12) - Champian Fulton - Vocals (tracks 3 and 8)
 produced by Tobias Gebb

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TOBIAS GEBB & TRIO WEST - AN UPPER WEST SIDE STORY

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TOBIAS
 GEBB

&

trio west

with Special Guests Joel Frahm and Champian Fulton



an upper

WESTSIDESTORY

As a student at the Manhattan School of Music in the mid-'90s, Tobias Gebb used to look out the big windows of the rehearsal rooms onto dramatic views of the Upper West Side, where he was born and raised. Drawing on personal history to organize and enhance his musical expression, the aspiring drummer/composer got the idea for Trio West. The music on this CD, *An Upper West Side Story*, evokes that very particular place in the universe: a stretch along the Hudson River where city life slows down a gear or two. It's a patch of land this musician has called home his entire life.

Gebb has worked in a variety of musical genres: he won a 1996 Grammy competition with the eclectic world-beat group Skizm, and gained insight and experience over the years working with such important producers as Phil Ramone, Terry Manning and Patrick Dillet. But throughout all this, Gebb's commitment to jazz never wavered. Having discovered Ahmad Jamal and the uncanny subtlety of drummer Vernell Fournier in college, he fell in love with music that is "relaxed and spacious, yet detailed and specific at the same time." The goal for Trio West was something "almost 'big band' in philosophy," he explains, "in that the music is all about the arrangement, and subtlety is of key importance".

In late 2006 the group recorded its debut, *Trio West Plays Holiday Songs*, an apt demonstration of the less-is-more approach, and a portrait of the musical bond between Gebb, pianist Eldad Zvulun and bassist Neal Miner. Zvulun, an Israeli based in New York for the last 10 years or so, met Gebb as a fellow resident of "upstate" Manhattan (Washington Heights). The two encountered Miner during sessions lower down the west side at Smalls, the storied late-night jazz spot. An Upper West Side Story revolves around these core characters but includes special guests as well: one of the most in-demand tenor saxophone players on the New York scene, Joel Frahm, whose tenor sax mastery combines daunting technique with the kind of streamlined melodic focus that Trio West favors; and Champion Fulton, a young vocalist originally from Oklahoma, whose lush vocals are heard regularly around the NYC jazz scene.

The album's broad stylistic references are quickly apparent. "The point was not to stay in one area of jazz," Gebb explains, "but to draw from swing, bebop, hardbop and cool, as well as music from Brazil, Cuba, Spain and even classic rock. So the common denominator is not the style of music but

rather the arranging style and the 'sound' of the trio."

The band leads off with "**Poinciana**," the signature 1958 hit by Ahmad Jamal. In view of the interpretive liberties taken, Gebb appended a subtitle: "What Time Is It?" "It implies that 'Poinciana' is going to go through a series of time changes," offers Gebb. "It's a play on his eight-and-a-half-minute version from *But Not For Me*: Ahmad Jamal at the Pershing. The arrangement is through-composed; even though it sounds like some things repeat, every section is actually a little different." This is also a strong example of Trio West's emphasis on time-feel changes that sound smooth and natural.

The first original of the set, Gebb's "**Brasil Bela**" ("beautiful Brazil"), is a straightforward, sunny bossa nova with a rich melodic flow, an effective feature for Zvulun and the trio. "I listen to a lot of Djavan and Jobim," says Gebb, "and I was going for a sort of old school '60s Brazilian thing."

The tempo picks up on "**The Barnyard**," featuring hot tenor work by Frahm. "This is partly influenced by Oliver Nelson's 'Hoe Down,' and other bright Cannonball stuff," says Gebb. Here, too, there is an unlikely Ahmad Jamal connection: even the extrovert Cannonball Adderley used to speak admiringly of Jamal's restraint and pared-down elegance. The form of Gebb's tune is also Jamalesque in its sleight-of-hand: "Usually you get blues with a bridge, on tunes like 'Unit 7,'" he notes. "This is the opposite: the A sections are eight bars each and the B section is the blues. As far as the title, my friends and I used to share many laughs about the 'barnyard' influence in jazz. Many folks aren't aware of the 'chicken shack' history in jazz music. Bluegrass, Texas swing, and country are all related cousins."

Billy Strayhorn's "**Star-Crossed Lovers**," from Duke Ellington's *Romeo and Juliet*-inspired opus "Such Sweet Thunder," is about as perfect a ballad melody as can be imagined, and Zvulun does a lovely job with it here. "I think of this as the Ahmad Jamal connection again," says Gebb, "in that the solo has to be extremely slow foreplay. Also, we're playing with the time feel again here, but in a way that's not so obvious. The time signature changes, but the intention is that it should be barely noticeable, even to musicians."

"**Autumn Serenade**" was given immortality on the 1963 Impulse album John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman, so it is appropriately a vocal and tenor sax feature here. The feel is tango-based at the start but then smoothly

transitions through a double-time samba feel and a bossa nova. Frahm's obbligatos are poignant and carefully weighed. Fulton's take on the winding, faintly dissonant melody, combined with Gebb's arranging style, sets up something like a film-noir atmosphere.

"**Cute**," by Neal Hefti, was a centerpiece of Count Basie's "New Testament" repertoire of the 1950s, and it finds Gebb in Sonny Payne mode, swinging solidly. "I've played entire gigs on brushes and been happy with it," he declares. "Whereas a lot of drummers are itching to play louder, I was never big on the bombastic drum feature. Vernell Fournier was a big influence there. On this track we're paying homage to the masters." The stop-time trading is tight and imaginative, with Gebb implying double-time over the groove.

"**Will O' the Wisp**" is a Manuel de Falla piece adapted by Gil Evans and played by Miles Davis on the 1960 classic *Sketches of Spain*. Not unlike "Autumn Serenade," it sets a mysterious mood, with a stately 3/4 tempo and inspired musings by Zvulun. "I add some snare drum texture and we create a solo section that doesn't exist on the Miles record," Gebb observes. The castanet sounds are from "a jury-rigged set of castanets with springs mounted on the hi-hat, so I can play them with one hand. When I play this recording for people they tend to ask who's playing percussion, or whether it's overdubbed. There's a lot going on but it's all live."

The old Billie Holiday vehicle "**What a Little Moonlight Can Do**" turns up the heat another notch. Vocals and tenor unite once again, as on "Autumn Serenade," but this time at a much brighter tempo. Fulton and Frahm trade colorful scat choruses as the trio cooks on a high flame.

"**Two By Two**" slows down the swing, with Miner stepping forward to play the initial parts of the melody. "This was influenced by 'Willow Weep for Me' and other slow walking ballads," explains Gebb. "The exchange between piano and bass, for me, has to do with the give and take in a relationship. You have to work together, there's push and pull on either side. The tune ends unresolved, because relationships are always a work in progress."

Irving Berlin's "**How Deep Is the Ocean**" alternates between 5/4 and a brisk 4/4 double-time swing. "On paper the arrangement looks really complicated," Gebb remarks. "But once you feel how it works, it's actually quite smooth because the quarter note doesn't change." Another example of natural time

shifts in the Trio West conception.

"**The Monument**," the final Gebb original, refers to an Upper West Side landmark: the Soldiers and Sailors memorial on 89th Street and Riverside Drive, a lofty perch that provides brilliant sunset views over the Hudson. The castanets return, as the group evokes a martial, funereal spirit and Frahm burns brilliantly. "This is one part anti-war song but also acknowledges the war that many fight against addiction," Gebb reveals. "I grew up right down the street from this monument and used to hang with my 'boys' there a lot. Most of these friends were (or are) musicians and a few have since died from either heroin or alcohol addiction. I wanted to pay my respects to both types of warrior: one who loses their life on a real battlefield, and the other who fights a quiet and insidious war of addiction, only to loose in the end."

Brightening the mood, the band leaves us with Lennon & McCartney's "**And I Love Her**." The group locks into a midtempo cha-cha beat, returning to a Latin theme that courses throughout the album. "There's that one melodic hook, that four-note bass line in the Beatles original that doesn't play a big structural role," says Gebb. "But it kept circulating in my head. So I based the arrangement off of that riff. Also, I wanted to achieve the sound of a traditional percussion section and by using various percussion sounds mounted around the drum set, I was able to play all the parts live."

You can't force anything in music and art, but if people click – and if they share a sensibility forged in the same physical locale, like the Upper West Side – then providential results can follow. That's why this group is particular about its borders. An early bio reads: "All the members of Trio West have lived or currently live on the west side of the city and any traitors will be summarily dismissed and politely driven across town whereupon they'll be forced to exit from a moving vehicle." Said with a wink, of course, but it gets at the truth that New Yorkers are fiercely attached to their neighborhoods. And that jazz musicians don't mess around.

– David R. Adler

David R. Adler writes for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Jazz Times* and other publications.