

The New Jazz Composers Octet the turning gate



1. The Turning Gate (10:13)
2. New (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) (7:17)
3. David and Goliath (7:08)
4. Once (8:13)
5. Bad Alchemy (4:38)
- The Faith Suite*
6. [I] In the Beginning (2:36)
7. [II] Twilight (6:56)
8. [III] The Doubtful (2:13)
9. [IV] Panic (6:39)
10. Onward (8:37)

David Weiss
Trumpet and Flugelhorn

Myron Walden
Alto Sax and Flute (Onward)

Jimmy Greene
Tenor Sax, Soprano Sax and Flute (The Doubtful)

Steve Davis
Trombone

Norbert Stachel
Baritone Sax and Bass Clarinet

Xavier Davis
Piano

Dwayne Burno
Bass

Nasheet Waits
Drums



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Jazz will always have a place for maverick individualism and the do-or-die of the cutting contest. But there's a selfless spirit at the heart of the music, a sense of common goals, collaboratively pursued. The New Jazz Composers Octet, under founder and trumpeter David Weiss, has embodied this for over 10 years now. Combining the casual vibe of the workshop with the fierce, play-for-keeps energy of the best gigging and recording units, the NJCO debuted in 1999 with *First Steps into Reality*, followed in 2003 by *Walkin' the Line*. They've also made two discs as the supporting band for trumpet legend Freddie Hubbard (*New Colors* and *On the Real Side*). Now comes *The Turning Gate*, a document of great intensity, refinement and far-reaching ambition.

Though it isn't said often enough, Weiss is one of the more accomplished figures of his generation, prized as a producer and arranger as well as a commanding horn player. His colleagues — Xavier Davis, Jimmy Greene, Myron Walden, Steve Davis, Norbert Stachel, Dwayne Burno, Nasheet Waits — come to *The Turning Gate* with résumés just as impressive, both as sidemen and leaders. Although quite busy, they remain devoted to Weiss's founding concept and eager to keep the NJCO in the game. "The whole point was to recognize these guys' abilities as writers and then give them something bigger to work with," Weiss notes. And not only have they delivered; they've consistently surpassed expectations. Weiss adds: "It's a really good feeling to walk into a rehearsal and someone hands out a pile of music and it's incredible."

That description holds up as you spin *The Turning Gate*, from the crawling rhythms and double-augmented sonorities of Weiss' title track to his rendering of John Greaves' "Bad Alchemy," originally by the '70s avant-rock band Henry Cow. To turn something as

superbly eccentric as this into an agile jazz chart takes no little imagination, but in the end, it's the players who hold the key. "The only way to pull it off was if Myron went to Myronland," says Weiss, alluding to Walden's sinuous alto solo.

If there's a centerpiece to the album, it is "The Faith Suite" by Xavier Davis, a multifaceted pianist described by Weiss as "the best accompanist of his generation, by far." The suite is in six movements; the first four unfold sequentially, while the last two, "New" and "David and Goliath," come earlier in the playlist.

What's most striking is the melodic and structural integrity of Davis' material: the flowing rhythm and galvanizing bass motion of "In the Beginning"; the chorale-like textures that announce "Twilight" (a foreshadowing of the rich orchestration heard at the start of Walden's "Onward"); the stark trombone and baritone sax musings heard on "The Doubtful" and "Panic," respectively. From one strong idea to the next, Davis draws expressive clarity from deep within and coaxes the best from every player, both soloists and ensemble.

Dwayne Burno's mournful "Once," in a luxuriant 3/4, has its main melody harmonized rather than stated by a single instrument. "Dwayne's always thought that way," says Weiss. "He's pretty vertical, especially on ballads. He's the only one who has really contributed ballads, in fact, and I

would say he's our most straightahead guy. On *Walkin' the Line*, his 'The Fork in the Road' was the only real straight swinging tune, and it was a great closer. Without even knowing it, everyone in the band has filled certain roles."

Similarly, the NJCO has filled a certain vital role in jazz, zeroing in on the hard-driving rhythm and deep harmonic thinking of the 1960s Blue Note era while creating new music in its own voice. It's accurate to call the band's purview the "mainstream" of modern jazz, though the word reflects the poverty of our language, connoting something safe, predictable and status quo when the NJCO is none of the above. At a time when genre boundaries are blurring and a high premium is placed on whole-cloth newness, people tend to underestimate those, like the NJCO, who commit to traditional models in order to mine their enduring generative potential. Weiss states it more bluntly: "Jazz is becoming a curse word like 'liberal' became a curse word." *The Turning Gate*, brimming with creativity, honesty and raw impeccable skill, is something of a pushback. It's got a way of making you stop, think and rethink.

— David R. Adler
Philadelphia, August 2008

David Adler regularly contributes to *Jazz Times*, *Down Beat*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Philadelphia Weekly* and he also serves as editor for *Jazz Notes*, the quarterly publication by The Jazz Journalists Association.

1. **The Turning Gate** David Weiss (Weda Music / BMI)
Soloists: Jimmy Greene- Soprano Sax and Xavier Davis- Piano
2. **New** Xavier Davis (Xav Dav Music/BMI)
Soloists: Steve Davis- Trombone and Xavier Davis- Piano
3. **David and Goliath** Xavier Davis (Xav Dav Music/BMI)
Soloists: Jimmy Greene- Tenor Sax and Nasheet Waits- Drums
4. **Once** Dwayne Burno (Burnobop Music/BMI)
Soloists: David Weiss- Trumpet and Xavier Davis- Piano
5. **Bad Alchemy** John Greaves (Virgin Music, Ltd)
Arranged by David Weiss. Soloist: Myron Walden- Alto Sax

The Faith Suite Xavier Davis (Xav Dav Music/BMI)

6. **[I] In the Beginning**
7. **[II] Twilight**
Soloists: Myron Walden- Alto Sax and Xavier Davis- Piano
8. **[III] The Doubtful**
Soloist: Steve Davis- Trombone
9. **[IV] Panic**
Soloist: Norbert Stachel- Baritone Sax
10. **Onward** Myron Walden (Norym Productions/BMI)
Soloists: Steve Davis- Trombone, Myron Walden- Alto Sax and Xavier Davis- Piano

Recorded on January 19 and December 20, 2005 at Systems Two, Brooklyn, NY
Produced by David Weiss
Executive Producer: Jana Herzen
Recorded and Mixed by Joe Marciano at Systems Two
Mastered by Mike Marciano at Systems Two
Audio Enhancement: Fred Kevorkian

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