

The Larry Newcomb Quartet featuring Jake Newcomb *Love, Dad*

A seasoned jazz veteran with a warm, appealing tone and an expansive harmonic vocabulary, guitarist Larry Newcomb showcases his straight ahead pedigree on *Love, Dad*, his third recording as a leader. Accompanied by brilliant pianist Thomas Royal, in-demand drummer Dave Marsh and the guitarist's son Jake Newcomb on bass, Newcomb and his stellar crew stake out some new musical territory in the wake of his 2017 outing, *Living Tribute*, featuring the late jazz guitar icon Bucky Pizzarelli, and 2015's *LIVE Intentionally!*, which received a four-star review in *Downbeat*.

On a program of six originals and four well-chosen cover tunes, they exhibit a natural chemistry together along with a playful sense of exploration and a collective urge to swing. And while Newcomb showcases his refined approach on the instrument, reflecting his years of gigging and his studies with such six-string heavyweights as Pizzarelli, Jack Wilkins and Pat Martino, he also reveals some of his inherent bluesiness along the way with occasional displays of wicked string bending. "I was a rocker, and particularly a blues-rocker," confessed the longtime New York City resident who is currently based in Gainesville, Florida. "I really got into Eric Clapton, which led me to B.B. King, Freddie King and Albert King. I was just deep into the blues and played it a lot, working all the time in blues-rock bands and country-rock bands. That's part of who I am, and I wanted to show some of that on this record."

It was while attending the University of Maine that Newcomb got turned on to jazz, via the Jim Hall-Ron Carter duo album, *Alone Together*. "When I heard that I said, 'That's what I want to do!'" And he hasn't looked back, immersing himself in jazz over the next couple of decades while also referencing his bluesy roots along the way.

This collection is book-ended by two standards that the quartet handles with swinging aplomb. It opens with a fresh take on "You Stepped Out of a Dream," the 1940 show tune that has been covered by everyone from Stan Getz and Sonny Rollins to Nat King Cole, Dave Brubeck and one of Newcomb's personal guitar heroes, Grant Green. Larry's arrangement of this oft-covered standard shifts seamlessly back and forth from 6/8 to 4/4, and the guitarist reveals another influence, Barney Kessel, in his deft sweep picking in the middle of his solo here.

The bossa-flavored original "Essential Messengers" showcases Newcomb's use of octaves on the melody upfront and a clear, deliberate approach to his single note solo. "That's an old tune," said the guitarist. "I started writing that a long time ago and put it together in New York with this arrangement."

The jaunty mid-tempo swinger, "Cliffhanger Blues," is underscored by Marsh's slick brushwork and Jake's deep-toned bass lines. Naturally, Larry's bluesy roots come to the fore here while pianist Royal contributes an exciting double-timed solo. Both piano and guitar engage in some animated exchanges of eights to conclude the earthy number.

The bossa-flavored title track is a melodic gem based on the chord changes to the standard "Stella By Starlight." Newcomb delivers some of his most lyrical playing of the set here while also indulging in more touches of Kessel-esque sweep picking. Both Royal and Jake also contribute superb solos here. The composer explains that the title comes from a standard closing he includes in all the texts he writes to his three sons.

One of those sons, Jake, is showcased on the tricky Oscar Pettiford number, "Tricotism." With Marsh again on brushes and Dad offering hip fingerstyle comping behind him, Jake carries the melody and solos confidently on this classic bebop number from 1954. Said the proud father, "When Jake was 11 or 12 years old he said to me, 'Dad, I want to pick up the guitar.' And I said, 'Jake, that's cool. Why don't you pick up bass? You'll always have a gig.' So he did. I lent him my '66 Fender Precision electric bass and he started on that and then he went pretty much immediately to the upright bass. And he just went through every teacher in Gainesville, then went to the University of Florida and then the University of North Texas. Bass is all he's really done his whole life and he's just a marvelous player. He lives two miles away and we play all the time. We have these weekly Covid Comfort and Beyond concerts that we stream on my Facebook page. It's great to be able to do these father-son duo gigs with him." Larry is particularly loose and carefree in his solo here while Royal elicits an effervescent feeling with his piano solo.

Larry's French waltz, "Soirée," is a minor key misterioso number that shows the guitarist in his most romantic gypsy jazz mode. Shifting moods radically, the crew then tackles a unique Afro-Cuban 6/8 version of the Sixties staple, "Secret Agent Man," that brings the guitarist all the way back to his garage band roots. "When I

took up guitar in the mid '60s, you had to be able to play that riff from 'Secret Agent Man,' and you had to make it nice and twangy," said Newcomb. "I like the way everybody played on it here. I feel good about it and it represents more of the rock and blues, rhythm and blues and jazz kind of mix in my playing." Royal contributes a harmonically probing piano solo here that takes the proceedings up a notch.

The noirish ballad "Hearts in Suspension," named after a Stephen King book documenting his collegiate life on the campus of the University of Maine, where Newcomb also attended, conjures up Thelonious Monk's melancholy "Round Midnight." "Love Intentionally" is a driving 6/8 romp with allusions to Wayne Shorter's "Footprints."

They close out on a burning note with an uptempo swinging version of the standard "The Song Is You," replete with Newcomb's urgent sweep picking and underscored by Marsh's exhilarating pulse. Jake also delivers a potent bass solo on this spirited number before Larry and Thomas engage in some fiery trading with drummer Marsh to close out this swinger. "When I got to New York in '99, I was transcribing a lot of Grant Green, including this number, but I was also inspired by hearing Stan Getz play this song," Newcomb recalled. "Later I had a trio that played brunch for 17 years at The Garage, and we frequently played 'The Song Is You.' I'm fascinated by that tune. It's kind of like 'All the Things You Are' in that you never get tired of it. And so I took on the challenge of playing it as an uptempo bop thing. And sweep picking helped me get a little velocity in some places that are very hard to do with picking articulation."

It's the perfect exclamation point on an eclectic package that bears the heartfelt title, *Love, Dad*. "This album is a celebration," said Newcomb. "It's celebrating the healing that took place after my divorce and after some medical difficulties that Jake had. At one point we almost lost him. And now he's healing from that. We're all healing."

Healing and swinging. — *Bill Milkowski*

Bill Milkowski is a contributor to *Downbeat*, *Jazziz* and *Absolute Sound*. He is also the author of "JACO: The Extraordinary and Tragic Life of Jaco Pastorius"

www.LarryNewcomb.com