



CHRISTIAN McBRIDE TRIO *LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD*

When Philadelphia-born bassist/bandleader **Christian McBride** arrived in New York in 1989 as a Juilliard student, he was the “Godchild of the Groove” with unlimited potential. Today, with over 300 recordings as a sideman and 11 critically-acclaimed albums as a leader, he now reigns supreme as the “Lord of the Lower Frequencies.” He’s the influential and ubiquitous bassist of his generation, as evidenced by his quintet Inside Straight, his big band, his trio and his work with everybody from James Brown, Pat Metheny, Chick Corea and Wynton Marsalis to Sting, The Roots, Bruce Hornsby and Paul McCartney.

It is fitting that the four-time Grammy® Award-winning McBride would eventually record at the Village Vanguard, the most hallowed and historical nightclub in jazz: an underground Mount Olympus where the gods and titans of the music – from John Coltrane to Bill Evans – have cast their syncopated spells.

“You can literally feel the ghosts of all of the legends that played there,” McBride says. “You feel Coltrane hovering in the vortex. You feel Monk hovering in the vortex. Miles Davis, Mingus... you feel all of that in the air.”

And with his new Mack Avenue Records album, *Live at the Village Vanguard*, you can feel and hear McBride in the same air, along with his magnificent trio, which features drummer **Ulysses Owens, Jr.** and pianist **Christian Sands**. They swing and swoon on nine tracks of originals, jazz standards and some surprise R&B/pop selections.

This record is the fruit of McBride’s long association with the Vanguard, where his first appearance as a leader for the historic club was in 1995. In 2007, the bassist and charismatic club owner Lorraine Gordon started an annual one-week residency, which featured McBride’s quintet, Inside Straight. “Lorraine enjoyed my trio and my quintet, Inside Straight. We had such large crowds, so after a few years with such supportive audiences, we added an extra week. Instead of doing the same band for two weeks, I just started bringing in a different band. This has been an ongoing relationship that I look forward to maintaining as long as I can.”

As encouraging as this association was, McBride’s fear of being typecast as a Ray Brown clone almost caused this trio to not be. “I thought the very last thing I wanted to do was to put myself in a trio, because then I’ll never be able to shed the Ray Brown comparison,” he says. “And then one day I decided that that’s sort of a silly reason not to start a trio, if musically that’s what makes sense. There were a few gigs that [saxophonist] Steve Wilson and [vibraphonist] Warren Wolf were unavailable for, so I decided to play with the rhythm section. Peter Martin was playing piano and Ulysses was playing drums. In 2010, Christian Sands started subbing for Peter in Inside Straight. So we started doing trio gigs and that’s how the group was born.

“In trying to find repertoire for the trio in our early stages, I tried to come up with songs that were easy to learn and that you can put your own spin on them,” he says. The opening track, Wes Montgomery’s “Fried Pies,” originally released on the guitarist’s 1963 LP, *Boss Guitar*, burns with a quicksilver, straight-ahead groove, as does the trio’s torrid take on J.J. Johnson’s “Interlude” from Cannonball Adderley’s 1965 *Domination* album.

Sands’ lilting composition “Sand Dune” would make a perfect companion to Coltrane’s “My Favorite Things” on any playlist, while the well-worn standard “Cherokee” is rendered at a blistering, swing-at-the-speed-of-sound. In contrast, the trio’s take on the spiritual “Down By The Riverside” grooves in a medium tempo buoyed by Owens’ expert and inspired drumming. Billie Holiday’s “Good Morning Heartache” is reborn by the trio with a ghostly, rubato intro, which evolves into a soulful, sonic séance.

Two selections from the album aurally illustrate how McBride's outward embrace of non-jazz material harkens back to a time when jazz had a long-standing engagement with pop music. The trio's treatment of the Rod Temperton-composed ballad "The Lady In My Life," (from Michael Jackson's uber-LP *Thriller*) resonates with the same kind of noir nuance Bill Evans was known for. "If anyone can get over the fact that it's not 'a jazz tune,' they'd be able to notice that it's got one of the most gorgeous melodies," McBride says. The album concludes with a spirited take on the funky title theme song the 1977 movie "Car Wash." "This was one tune where even my band members looked at me side-eyes [laughs]," McBride says. "Even my wife said, 'so what's next? 'I Will Survive'?"

McBride's inspirations Ray Brown and James Brown, his respect for non-jazz genres and his outgoing personality account for this sensational recording and for his growing stature as a jazz spokesperson and ambassador.

McBride hosts and produces "The Lowdown: Conversations With Christian," on SiriusXM satellite radio and National Public Radio's weekly show, "Jazz Night In America." He also serves as Artistic Advisor for Jazz Programming at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), and he works with Jazz House Kids, a nationally recognized community arts organization founded by his wife, vocalist Melissa Walker, dedicated to educating children through jazz.

"I'm glad to have these vehicles, like the NPR show, like the Sirius/XM show," he says, "where I can tell people who may, or may not be into jazz, 'hey, come on over and play with us'." *Live at the Village Vanguard* is the titan bassist's infectious invitation to come swing with him.

About Christian McBride Trio:

"When I first met Ulysses, he was a student at my summer camp in Aspen, CO. He had a lot of maturity in his playing, particularly the way he played brushes. I could tell he spent a lot of time with Lewis Nash and Kenny Washington and really studied the legendary drummers. And it was a relief to hear a young drummer who wasn't coming out of the same bag as other drummers.

"When I first met Christian, I was told he was a protégé of Dr. Billy Taylor, Hank Jones and Oscar Peterson, all of those legendary elder statesmen of the piano," McBride says. "But then, I heard him playing all of this esoteric, angular music coming out of an Andrew Hill/Paul Bley bag. And then, I found out he'd been studying with Vijay Iyer, Jason Moran and Gonzalo Rubalcaba. I thought man; this cat knows the whole language.

"I realized that with guys like Ulysses and Christian, we can go anywhere we want to go: angular, swinging, esoteric, blues, impressionistic and funk."

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