



Gary Bartz, Larry Willis, Buster Williams, and Al Foster Join Forces in Historic Configuration, Heads of State

Set to Release *Search for Peace* - July 10 on Smoke Sessions Records

Gary Bartz, Larry Willis, Buster Williams and **Al Foster**--four of today's most important and influential jazz artists--have joined forces as a collaborative group for the first time in their storied careers and the result is a quartet for the ages.

Somewhat surprisingly after a half-century of working together in various combinations, these four masters had never performed together as a quartet until last fall at Smoke Jazz & Supper Club in New York City. They electrified the packed house during that run and knew immediately that they had something special. As Williams remembers, "Larry called me the next week, and said, 'What do you think about us keeping this band together?' I said, 'I like the idea; let me talk to Al and Gary.'" They agreed and the rest was history in the making.

They were billed for those first performances as the Larry Willis All-Stars, and their purpose was to pay tribute to NEA Jazz Master McCoy Tyner. For artists of this stature to come together with a unified focus upon another master, that individual needs to be one of enormous significance; McCoy Tyner is certainly that. Bartz, Williams and Foster have all played and recorded with the legendary pianist going back to the '60s and '70s and there's no one more fitting than Willis to capture both the explosive drive and filigreed subtlety of the master.

After another sold-out run in January 2015, the band headed into the studio. What had originally been intended to be a one-time thing has blossomed into **Heads of State**, a stunning new ensemble powerfully manifested by their debut album on **Smoke Sessions Records**, ***Search for Peace***.

The Tyner concept provides the core for this brilliant recording, not only titled for his majestic hymnal ballad, but also containing four other pieces associated with his prolific legacy--two pieces he performed with the unparalleled Classic John Coltrane Quartet, and two Bartz originals from Tyner albums on which Bartz participated as a sideman.

Although Bartz still plays in Tyner's groups on occasion--a relationship dating back into the late '60s--he has been a renowned leader for nearly as long. All four of these gentlemen are highly respected in their own right and have shared the stage with nearly every jazz legend and heavyweight musician of the entire modern era. Combining that wealth of history and their individual virtuosity into a synergy and spirit that provides a visceral group identity makes Heads of State as formidable an ensemble as any on today's scene. Bartz's fluently articulate and always inventive alto and soprano saxes are perfectly framed by the rhythm section, with Willis comping mightily or embellishing subtly as demanded by the music; Williams' vibrant wood and potent pulse; and Foster's inspired and sensitively dynamic drumming.

From the opening strains of Coltrane's classic "Impressions," it's eminently clear that the vitality and urgent creativity of the era that spawned these four giants will be on full display; not only in the fire and energy of this piece and Bartz's "Soulstice," but also in the relaxed swing and beautiful balladry that

comprises the rest of the album. Of the former, "Search for Peace" is a lengthy exploration of the classic paeon that is simply exquisite, and Sigman & Russell's "Crazy She Calls Me" is deeply emotive and poignantly lovely.

There are unexpected surprises as well. Billy Strayhorn's heartbreakingly beautiful "Lotus Blossom" is re-imagined in medium swing on an infectious bass ostinato without losing any of its haunting eloquence. Warren & Gordon's "I Wish I Knew"--which Tyner buoyed so appealingly on Trane's *Ballads* album--is in an easy groove over a distinctly Tyner-ish vamp.

Sparkling swing in mid-tempo variations are the order for Jackie McLean's nicely grooving "Capuchin Swing," airily jaunty on Benny Carter's Summer "Serenade," and playfully whimsical on Bartz's delectably Monk-ish "Uncle Bubba."

This configuration of elder statesmen serves as a salient reminder of what makes jazz such a powerful and poignant art form. **Search for Peace** is a compelling beginning for this group, leaving all in anticipation of what is to come from this newly conceived partnership. As pianist Ethan Iverson wrote on his blog, *Do the Math*, "Larry Willis, Gary Bartz, Buster Williams, Al Foster at Smoke. Jazz like this still exists? Apparently they are playing McCoy Tyner tunes. Fine. Whatever gets them on the bandstand together." Yes, jazz like this is alive and well with **Heads of State** at the helm.

"Search for Peace" was recorded live in New York at Sear Sound's Studio C on a Sear-Avalon custom console at 96KHz/24bit and mixed to 1/2" analog tape using a Studer mastering deck. Available in audiophile HD format.

Heads of State · Search for Peace
Smoke Sessions Records · Release Date: **July 17, 2015**
Release Performances: **July 24 - 26 @ Smoke Jazz Club**

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