



## **Trombonist Steve Davis Composes for New Sextet of Jazz Giants and Longtime Associates on *Think Ahead*, Available May 26 via Smoke Sessions Records**

In life as in jazz, you never know what's coming around the next corner -- so it's always best to think ahead. Trombonist/composer **Steve Davis** not only offers those two words as a sound piece of advice on his new album, ***Think Ahead***, but exemplifies the art of putting it into action. Out **May 26** from **Smoke Sessions Records**, ***Think Ahead*** offers a master class in reacting to the unpredictable from an elite group of jazz all-stars whose ability to create spontaneously borders on the clairvoyant.

In part, that's simply due to the fact that Davis has assembled a stellar group of masters: the trombonist is joined by saxophonists **Steve Wilson** and **Jimmy Greene**, pianist **Larry Willis**, bassist **Peter Washington** and drummer **Lewis Nash**, each deserving the title of "jazz giant" in their own right. But add the fact that the bandleader shares with every member of the ensemble a long and deep history, and you have the makings of a truly profound, flawlessly swinging, flat-out *burning* set of music.

"I've been deeply involved with everyone in this band on not only a professional level but as friends for decades," Davis says. "So it was more than an honor to have this group together."

Davis and Wilson have worked together in numerous settings over the past 25 years, most notably in Chick Corea's Origin sextet, bassist Avishai Cohen's band, and more recently in the Christian McBride Big Band. Greene first came to Davis' notice when the saxophonist was a teenage student of the trombonist's mentor, legendary saxophonist Jackie McLean, at the Hartt School of the University of Hartford in Connecticut. The two went on to work together with McLean, Freddie Hubbard, in David Weiss' New Jazz Composers Octet, and in Avishai Cohen's band when Greene stepped in for Steve Wilson.

Washington was the original bassist for the hard-bop super-group One For All, of which Davis is a founding member, and along with Nash has played alongside Davis in the Jimmy Heath Big Band for more than a decade. Nash and Davis have also logged countless hours on the road together with the Dizzy Gillespie All Star Big Band and Quintet. Davis heard the two of them playing together with pianist Tommy Flanagan at the Village Vanguard almost 20 years ago, and later in Larry Willis' trio at the Umbria Jazz Festival, where the trombonist was on the bill as part of Claudia Acuña's band.

"For six nights in a row, they played at six and we played at midnight, and I went to hear them every night," Davis recalls. "I'd go and see them, get my lessons, and then play that night. Ever since then I've hoped to record with that rhythm section."

Finally, Willis is someone that Davis considers "a hero." His influence was in the trombonist's ears from an early age, through Blue Note recordings with the likes of Jackie McLean and Lee Morgan, and later through seeing him live with Blood, Sweat & Tears, the Fort Apache Band, and the Roy Hargrove Quintet, whose paths crossed often with Origin's. "I dreamed of playing with him," Davis says. "Eventually we hit it off and became friends - we're both complete baseball and basketball fiends. It's like having another musical father, but we're also colleagues and buddies."

While the focus of ***Think Ahead*** is on Davis' memorable original compositions, Tony Williams' "Warrior" proves the ideal choice to reveal the fiery intensity that this sextet and its powerhouse frontline can achieve at the outset. Nash's propulsive rhythm ignites short, bold statements from all three horns and Willis before the drummer takes his own explosive turn. The other side of the spectrum is represented later by the familiar standard "Polka Dots and Moonbeams," which leads off with a tender solo intro from Willis before Davis expresses the melody with an airy delicacy that few can coax from the trombone. "Love Walked In" is a bouncy, joyful stroll through the Gershwin favorite, while "Little B's Poem" is a poignant send-off for the late vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson, another idol with whom Davis got to play twice: once with McLean, and later with Corea.

If the line that Davis trades with Wilson's soprano on "Abena's Gaze" suggests a look both warm and incisive, that's exactly the impression that the composer would like to give of his fiancée, singer and educator Abena Koomson. A teacher of ethics at the Ethical Culture Fieldston School in the Bronx, Koomson also played the title character's mother in the Off-Broadway production of the musical Fela! "And yes," Davis adds, "she possesses quite an intense, wonderful gaze."

The soulful "A Little Understanding," is Davis' funky plea for just that, at a time when a lack thereof seems to dominate the headlines. (The current political climate, he jokes, is another reason to "think ahead" - to, say, four years and an election cycle in the future.) "Mountaintop" takes its title from a more inspirational leader in that regard, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. - in part because the steely chords that open the minor blues evoke Dr. King's aspirational message, but also due to the fact that the recording date happened to land on the January holiday in his honor (the rare date when all of these in-demand artists could coordinate their schedules).

The soaring "Atmosphere" harkens back to Davis' and Wilson's tenure with Chick Corea; the chord changes were borrowed from the pianist's "500 Miles High," which the two had occasion to revisit with him recently as part of Corea's landmark two-month 75th birthday celebration at the Blue Note in New York City. Davis' version becomes a vehicle for Willis' eloquent playing and Wilson's agile, lyrical flute. The title track is an exercise in thinking ahead, with rapid-fire chord changes that offer an elusive, constantly shifting landscape for the soloists to navigate. The wistful "Evening Shades of Blue," meanwhile, paints a lush portrait of twilight in Hartford, wistfully evoked by Wilson's yearning soprano.

Finally, "Farewell, Brother" ends the date on a loving but tragic note, as a heartfelt tribute to an actual, rather than metaphoric, brother. Not long after a Christmas visit to Davis' native Binghamton, New York, where he introduced his new fiancée to his parents and younger brother Peter, Davis received a phone call that he calls "the worst of my life," informing him that Peter had passed away suddenly from an aortic aneurysm. "It's one of those things in life that you think could never happen to you, it happened in my family," Davis says. The tune focuses not on Peter's too-early death but on his infectious sense of humor and his giving spirit. Beyond its literal meaning, the title is a winking play on the fact that as a social worker, Peter's clients would often refer to him only as "The Welfare" - Davis flips the "welfare" around into "farewell," a final joke that Peter would no doubt have appreciated.

*"Think Ahead" was produced by Paul Stache and Damon Smith and recorded live in New York at Sear Sound's Studio C on a Sear-Avalon custom console at 96KHz/24bit and mixed to ½" analog tape using a Studer mastering deck. Available in audiophile HD format.*

**Steve Davis Album Releases Performances:**

June 2 - 4 | Smoke Jazz Club | New York, NY

**Steve Davis · *Think Ahead***

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