

Virtuoso Pianist Laurence Hobgood Steps into the Spotlight with *Honor Thy Fathers* - Available February 12

Trio Features John Patitucci and Kendrick Scott

With *Honor Thy Fathers*, Laurence Hobgood embarks on a striking new chapter in what has already been a storied career. Hobgood's 18-year tenure as musical director for singer Kurt Elling drew to a close in late 2013, leading to a long-overdue step into the spotlight for the renowned virtuoso pianist, composer and arranger. He seizes that opportunity with a bold and original trio outing that pays homage to a selection of personal mentors, influences and father figures.

Hobgood's incredibly fruitful collaboration with Elling garnered Grammy® nominations for each of the ten albums on which they collaborated, two for Hobgood's arrangements, and a win for Hobgood as producer of 2009's *Dedicated To You: Kurt Elling Sings The Music Of Coltrane and Hartman*. The same qualities that earned such high praise are brilliantly displayed here: finely crafted compositions, inventive arrangements, and deeply soulful expression.

There may be no greater testament to the esteem in which Hobgood is held among his peers than his collaborators on *Honor Thy Fathers*: bassist John Patitucci and drummer Kendrick Scott. The pianist isn't exaggerating when he refers to the pair as "two of the world's greatest musicians," but only modesty would exclude him from the same estimation. Hobgood originally worked with both under Elling's auspices – Patitucci on *The Gate* (2011) and Scott on its follow-up, *1619 Broadway: The Brill Building Project* (2012) – but this recording session marked the first time all three had played together. Their sensitivity and profoundly intuitive interplay belies that fact, however, sounding more cohesive and empathetic than many a long-established trio.

While Hobgood has released several albums in the past, both solo and with jazz greats like Charlie Haden, *Honor Thy Fathers* marks a new beginning for the pianist, one in which he finally plays the lead role. "I'm in a unique position because I'm well known in the jazz world but I'm not known as a leader," he admits. "I've toured all over the world, played in the best situations alongside top acts, and worked with some of the greatest people in the record business. In the course of having those kinds of experiences you learn a lot about what goes into making a great record."

Honor Thy Fathers begins with its most obvious honoree: Burnet Hobgood, the pianist's father, who passed away in December 2000. "Sanctuary" movingly projects the sense of "quiet strength" that Hobgood always associated with his father, a theater artist and devoted family man. "He was very loving and brilliant but quietly so," Hobgood remembers. "For me, the ideal of manhood is a quiet, giving, loving strength and support. And that's who he was. Hence the statement about how he was my sanctuary for 41 years."

Another integral figure in Hobgood's early development was his teacher at the University of Illinois, the Sicilian-born classical composer Salvatore Martirano. He's memorialized with the elegant sweep of "Triptych;" intricate yet melodically lyrical, this piece exemplifies the "left turn," Martirano's cherished concept of the unexpected moment that makes harmonious sense. "It's the perfect thing to come right now, but the last thing you would have expected," Hobgood explains. "Sal and I both liked risk. I like to hear people painting themselves into corners and I want to find out how they'll get themselves out. Sal embodied what I think of as the big lessons of music."

Most of the tributes on *Honor Thy Fathers* pay respect to musical rather than personal influences. That begins with "Straighten Up and Fly Right," a cannily harmonized reinvention of Nat King Cole's signature tune. Buoyed by a sleek groove—and a smartly re-cast in 7/4 times—the piece is a raucous and rollicking take on the classic song, maintaining the sly humor of the

original lyrics. Hobgood sums up the legendary pianist's legacy succinctly in the liner notes, writing, "Nat Cole is one of the most underrated jazz pianists who ever lived. Period."

"Give Me the Simple Life" and "The Waltz" celebrate Hobgood's two earliest piano heroes: the former is the first track on the first jazz record that young Laurence ever owned, Oscar Peterson's "Tracks;" while the latter is an original penned in tribute to Bill Evans. Hobgood's own approach to the keyboard may show the more obvious influence of Evans' hushed genius, but the traces of what he calls Peterson's "ebullient, virtuosic artistry" remain as well. The album's closer, "Shirákumo No Michi (White Cloud Way)," salutes Wayne Shorter by drawing on *The Way of the White Clouds*, an inspirational book about a German-born man who became a Lama in Tibet – an apt parallel for the mystically-minded Shorter, who Hobgood calls "the paramount Bodhisattva of modern jazz music."

Stevie Wonder's "If It's Magic," from the classic *Songs in the Key of Life* shows off Hobgood's deft ability to both interpret popular song and to wholly re-imagine his material. Originally a wistful ballad, which Wonder sang to the accompaniment of a classical harp, Hobgood's rendition is a spry, up-tempo burner. Finally, with "The Road Home" Hobgood memorializes Charlie Haden, the influential bassist who passed away last year. The two played together on Hobgood's 2013 release *When the Heart Dances*, which proved to be a momentous occasion for the pianist.

"With 'The Road Home,' I set out to capture the combination of Charlie's soulfulness with his incredible intelligence, something that Charlie and I had in common. We both had family-based roots in southern traditional music – in his case, the folk music of the Ozark mountains, for me my parents' ties to Kentucky and the Appalachian traditional music of the Pine Mountain region. Getting to make a duet recording with Charlie was one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. His sound was so huge because his spirit was so huge."

On *Honor Thy Fathers*, Hobgood's tips of the hat to these mentors come across not only through the pieces' literal dedications and choice of material. Perhaps the most important tribute he pays is by playing in the expressive, distinctive voice that each of them has played a part in forging.

Laurence Hobgood · *Honor Thy Fathers*

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