



## **Saxophonist Dan Pratt Celebrates Espousing Happiness and Forward-Thinking Mentality on *Hymn for the Happy Man* - Available June 3**

**Album Features Christian McBride,  
Gregory Hutchinson and Mike Eckroth**

### **Album Release Performance in New York City at Smalls Jazz Club on June 2**

Following two critically acclaimed organ group outings, New York saxophonist-composer **Dan Pratt** heads in a different direction on *Hymn for the Happy Man*, his fourth recording overall and debut for his own Same Island Music imprint. "After eight years, the organ group had a great run, and I found myself looking for something new to do," explains the California native and longtime Brooklyn resident. "So for this record I decided to go with the piano-bass-drums-sax quartet instrumentation, which is so foundational to jazz. It was one of those things that was staring me straight in the face and I couldn't see it, but on reflection it was such a clear choice. I'd never recorded a quartet record, and to go in the direction I wanted to go, I felt I needed to explore an instrumentation that is such an essential strand to jazz's DNA."

Pratt assembled his "dream team" of bassist **Christian McBride**, drummer **Gregory Hutchinson** and pianist **Mike Eckroth** to help him realize seven well-crafted originals and breathe new life into one well-chosen standard. The saxophonist-composer, a member of McBride's big band, heaps high praise on his stellar sidemen for this simpatico session. "McBride and Hutch are incredibly open-minded and agile musicians. Christian is one of a kind. He has a pulse that is really unimpeachable and super singular. There's nobody who plays the bass like him. Add to that his warmth and positivity, and you have a paragon of musicianship as well as humanity. With Greg, I didn't tell him anything except for two or three words about the concept of a piece, and he just gave me something different with every take. Often, it was hard to decide on a take because everything he did was so incredibly compelling. The kind of surprises that I got from Christian and Greg were so delightful; they were things that I could never imagine explaining or asking for."

"And I'm super happy with what Mike played," Pratt continues. "What he was playing behind me felt like he really understood where I was going, what I was playing, and the ideas behind the harmonies of my tunes. And the more adventurous I was, the more into it he was. It's nice to know that I've got that strong ear behind me so when I want to go in a freer direction he always hears it, and he hears it in a melodic context, too."

The foursome kicks off the program with the off-kilter, Monkish "Gross Blues," which has Hutchinson flowing freely over the bar line while McBride keeps steady time with his inimitable groove. "I didn't tell Greg anything but 'Keep it loose and trashy,' and that's what he came up with," recalls Pratt. Eckroth feeds the saxophonist dissonant voicings, nudging him harmonically into some passionate, upper register wailing. McBride also delivers a typically chops-laden solo on this urgent opener.

Pratt affects a singing quality through the rich harmonic terrain of "New Day," and for good reason. "I wrote it after I met the woman who is now my wife, and I just felt this incredible elation," he explains. "It's different than when you meet someone you're smitten with. It's a feeling when you meet somebody and you realize that there is this life-partner potential; a person who brings out the best in you, who inspires you to be the best that you can be, and that inspiration happens by her being who she is." Hutchinson's playing on this breezy, uplifting number is lively and highly interactive. "He totally elevates the piece throughout the whole thing," says Pratt. "What he's playing has this wonderful arc that really fits the spirit of the tune."

Hutchinson's sparse mallet work helps set the darkly delicate tone of "River," which is cast in the vein of such ruminative classics as Wayne Shorter's "Fall" or Miles Davis' "Flamenco Sketches." As the composer explains, "Most of my tunes can be sort of active, and I wanted to write something that was more patient; a tune whose activity lived within its patience. So I was thinking of the reflective nature of watching a river, not really being in the flow of the river but rather reflecting on the river's flow itself, that staid kind of strength but also fluidity."

The effervescent "Warsaw" has Pratt switching to alto sax and burning a blue streak over Hutchinson's highly-charged pulse as McBride's contrapuntal lines add layers of intrigue. "Alto is very new for me," says Pratt, who started on baritone saxophone in eighth grade before switching to tenor later in high school. "I just got the alto not even a year before this recording session and I was so enamored with the sound that I decided to record a couple tunes with it. I just thought for range and timbre it provided something a little different on this tune."

Pratt returns to tenor for the loose second line vibe of "Junket" and the moody, alluring "Riddle Me Rhumba" before pulling out the alto again on the buoyant "Hymn for the Happy Man," a title which fits his own personal philosophy. "It was written in tribute to the humanity that chooses to strive toward deeper happiness; not circumstantial happiness but happiness from within," he explains. "It's to celebrate espousing happiness and a forward-thinking kind of mentality and spirit."

The collection closes with Pratt's unique interpretation of the Kurt Weill-penned jazz standard "Speak Low," which incorporates some clever rhythmic devices to break things up in intriguing ways. "I realized that I'm increasingly interested in playing with space and form, and I want to carry that same sense of joy and play in the music that I write through my arrangements as well," he explains. "So this arrangement is an example of that kind of playfulness. It starts out like any other standard arrangement of 'Speak Low' in a count-it-off-at-a-jam-session kind of way, but there's a lot of very specific and subtle treatments done to the form and chord progression that just basically open up places where you wouldn't necessarily normally have them opened up. I'm really just looking for opportunities for the unexpected to occur."

Those kinds of surprises are prevalent throughout *Hymn for the Happy Man*, which stands as Pratt's most ambitious and fully-realized recording to date.

**Dan Pratt · Hymn for the Happy Man**  
**Same Island Music · Release Date: June 3, 2016**

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