

Joey Calderazzo

Haiku



Everybody knows Joey Calderazzo the phenomenal *band* pianist. From the time of his emergence with Michael Brecker in 1986 through his recent work in the Branford Marsalis Quartet, and on five previous albums under his own name, Calderazzo has proved to be among the most intense and engaged of contemporary soloists and accompanists. His energy, technique and rapid-fire imagination have marked him as one of the most exciting jazz pianists to emerge in the past two decades. Calderazzo has documented this commanding mastery of group interplay on five previous albums that found him matching ideas and passions with such imposing artists as Brecker, Marsalis, Jerry Bergonzi, Jack DeJohnette, Dave Holland, John Patitucci and Jeff "Tain" Watts.

After nearly two decades in the spotlight Calderazzo has become a more complete and nuanced player, one equally capable of touching souls with his taste and sensitivity. The complete range of Calderazzo's skills has never been more evident than on *Haiku*, his debut disc on Marsalis Music.

By his own admission, Calderazzo needed time to confront the challenge of unaccompanied performance. "The complete exposure of solo piano always scared me in the past," he notes. "But the music I was writing, and the direction my playing was going, demanded that I focus on solo piano to capture what was in my head. As time passed, I slowly started doing more solos on my own gigs, and I finally reached the point where there was nothing for me to be afraid of. I was still unsure when I scheduled a series of solo gigs in England, until one concert that was supposed to be 70 minutes long ended up running two hours with all of the encores. That was the breakthrough."

Calderazzo applied himself to the solo challenge with intense listening and deep thinking about what the format required. "I bought about fifteen solo piano records, everything from Art Tatum, Keith Jarrett, Chick Corea and Brad Mehldau to Jelly Roll Morton and some classical stuff. But the real key was realizing that I shouldn't follow influences, and that I shouldn't think about missing the bass and drums. I realized that, playing solo, I could really present *me*, and I think that this is the first album that really sounds like me."

Confirmation of Calderazzo's point can be heard immediately on "Bri's Dance," *Haiku's* opening track. "The funny thing about the tune is that the bridge is from one of Branford's songs, 'Citizen Tain.' I needed a bridge, and somehow that just came out. The entire piece was composed in a couple of minutes."

The beautiful “Haiku,” in contrast, began life as a trio vehicle, and was heard on Calderazzo’s self-titled Columbia CD. “I began to play ‘Haiku’ as a solo feature on my trio gigs and it began to evolve,” he says of the memorable melody that has found its own spellbinding groove in this unaccompanied setting.

“The Legend of Dan” is another older piece that has changed over time. “That one has a funny history,” Calderazzo says, “including lyrics that Tain wrote. There is no Dan, he’s an imaginary person, but the song has become its own legend. It was originally written for Michael Brecker, and I played it a few times with him. There’s a feeling of innocence in the solo version that I really like.”

Calderazzo’s other two originals are newer pieces. “I used to listen to ten or twelve records when I studied music, but now I study by listening to one record over and over. At one point, my record of choice was Chopin nocturnes, and it really changed the way I play ballads. ‘Chopin’ comes out of that experience, and I think I really captured the vibe of that piece.”

“Dancin’ for Singles” is Calderazzo’s first foray into stride piano. “I have never heard many of my personal favorites play stride,” he explains, “but I didn’t want a one-dimensional approach to solo playing and was determined to get a whole range of feelings into the album. Five years ago, I wouldn’t have tried something like this; but playing with Branford has taught me that making music is a process, and that the joy will come when you hear the growth on the stride piece I include in my next solo album. I just listened to Art Tatum and Jelly Roll Morton, and got the humor from Jelly. The coolest part for me is that it’s my own song, that I wrote something where a stride left hand fits.”

To complete *Haiku*, Calderazzo chose two of his favorite standards, “Just One of Those Things” and “My One and Only Love,” plus compositions by two of his favorite musicians. “I love Kenny Kirkland’s tunes, but had never recorded any of them, and ‘Dienda’ is one that I felt I could interpret solo. It just worked with the rest of the music, almost like something I would have written. And Branford suggested that I try his piece ‘A Thousand Autumns.’ When we perform it as a quartet, there’s a place where the rest of the band drops out, and I’ve been getting into some stuff that Branford thought we should document.”

Calderazzo also credits Marsalis with the magnificent sound of *Haiku*. “Branford takes mental notes of every hall we play in, and he chose to record in George Weston Recital Hall in Toronto. The setting where you record really affects what you hear and how you play, and a good hall, with natural acoustics and a couple of mikes in the back, is the only way to go. I can’t imagine recording solo in a studio.”

What Calderazzo can imagine is more solo playing in his future. While continuing to display his interactive skills in the collective cauldron of Marsalis’ quartet, he is simultaneously finding new levels of feeling, and new directions, in the unaccompanied format. “I learned

more from this album than from any album I ever did," the pianist emphasizes. "Playing solo just feels right. To do more of that, then get back together with Branford and Mike will just be the best." Now Joey Calderazzo's fans can learn more about his expanding talents on *Haiku*.

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MARSALIS MUSIC is the creation of Branford Marsalis, one of the most celebrated jazz musicians of the past 20 years. Based upon his extensive experience as a saxophonist, composer and bandleader, Marsalis recognized the need to form a label that will allow a diverse array of musicians to document their best efforts without the commercial pressures that have become the norm throughout the industry. The label's focus will be primarily but not exclusively on jazz, with a roster featuring promising new artists as well as Marsalis himself and established stylists, and the label will receive marketing and distribution support through its partnership with Rounder Records. In addition, Marsalis Music sponsors educational and cultural initiatives including Marsalis Jams, a program designed to present leading jazz ensembles in performance/jam session settings on college campuses.

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