

Mike Holober Triumphs Again on *Quake*, His New CD With The Gotham Jazz Orchestra

January 27th Release is Acclaimed Pianist-Composer's Debut on Sunnyside Records

Pianist-composer Mike Holober continues to establish himself as one of the jazz world's most commanding figures with each new project and performance.

A remarkably adroit and forceful instrumentalist who first came to prominence during the early 1990s in a quartet led by late baritone sax great Nick Brignola, Holober has won wide acclaim in the past 10 years for his own small group and big band efforts around the globe.

Now, on *Quake*, the new CD from Mike Holober & The Gotham Jazz Orchestra and the ensemble's January 27th debut on Sunnyside Records, his resplendent musical artistry again triumphs.

Holober's engaging original compositions and thoughtful arrangements have earned him the deep respect of his peers over the years, and, understandably so, a number of the top practitioners of the Improviser's Art, like bassist John Patitucci, drummer Brian Blade and saxophonist Tim Ries, have readily accepted the pianist's invitations to join him in the studio and on the bandstand.

Quake, which is Holober's second recording with The Gotham Jazz Orchestra, brings together a stunning all-star amalgam that features Ries and fellow saxophonists Dave Pietro, Charles Pillow, Jon Gordon and Steve Kenyon; trombonists Bruce Eidem, Mark Patterson, Pete McGuinness and Nate Durham; and trumpeters Tony Kadleck, Scott Wendholt, Joe Magnarelli and Craig Johnson. The rhythm section, bedrocked by big band drummer extraordinaire John Riley, boasts guitarist Steve Cardenas, bassist John Hebert and Holober on piano and Fender Rhodes. Says Holober, with some modesty, "I feel lucky and extremely grateful to have been able to collaborate with some of the most talented musicians I know on *Quake*. Their contributions amazed me and helped crystallize my ideas."

Those who have closely followed Holober's musical career know that he has long sought inspiration from the natural world for his music.

On *Canyon*, a quintet recording from 2003, he was able to broadly translate his experiences and perceptions from the wilderness into his musical compositions, especially on the title track, "Ansel's Easel" and "Heart of the Matter." Landscapes and the metaphor of travel play an important role on *Thought Trains*, Holober's debut with The Gotham Jazz Orchestra the following year, and the title track from his 2006 CD *Wish List* is based on hiking trips he intended on taking—and completed. (The eerie, impressionistic photographs on the *Wish List* CD booklet are courtesy of Holober and his wife Melissa Hall, an art historian and educator, from a trip to the Sierras.)

Holober says that most of *Quake* was composed between 2003 and 2006 when he was a four-time fellow at the MacDowell Colony in Petersborough, New Hampshire and in residence at Yaddo, the

artists' community in Saratoga Springs, NY. Nature and the experience of place, again, play a large part in his work.

Characteristically, the rustling of Aspen leaves in the New England forests spurred the title track, which leads off *Quake*, and it does not take much to hear the breeze lifting along with the brass and reeds before giving way to Ries's playful soprano sax and Wendholt's authoritative trumpet declarations. Meanwhile, on "Thrushes," the soft, thought out theme is established by Holober's piano against the sax section, with the horns punctuating his statements and from which arise exquisite solos from Magnarelli and McGuinness. It's brilliantly worked out: First you notice the birdsong, then really focus on it, before it recedes as your attention drifts—an organic episode where idea and form mirror each other. And on "Note to Self," a scintillating tune that Holober says was conceived during long walks at Yaddo, many listeners will recall jazz's reigning conceptualist, Dave Brubeck.

The openness in Holober's writing, plus its mercurial tempo and timbre changes, affords generous opportunities for venturesome stretching out, where soloists are often isolated with the rhythm section or small groups before being lifted by the entire ensemble. "Twist and Turn," a bossy workout that commences with Holober vamping on the electric piano to a slinky beat, puts Wendholt (again) and Charles Pillow in the spotlight, while alto saxman Dave Pietro shines with a Monk-ish solo on the imaginative, wholly modern re-reading of George Harrison's "Here Comes the Sun" (commissioned by the Westchester Jazz Orchestra, where Holober has been artistic director since 2007). Ries, a regular in the horn section of the Rolling Stones, dazzles on the rock band's classic "Ruby Tuesday," deconstructed here in an arrangement that lets Cardenas's electric guitar get the last word, but he also shows a whispery side on "Roc and a Soft Place," a homage to the late big band leader Joe Roccisano, who served as a mentor to Holober and others when they were first getting New York bandstand experience.

Holober takes several turns as a soloist on *Quake* as well, most notably on "Thrushes" and "Note to Self," where his expressive, lyrical playing hints at his wide studies in classical music. A native of Brooklyn, he grew up mostly on Long Island, focusing on music early on and learning to play the flute and saxophone along with the piano. After receiving a master's degree in classical piano at Binghamton University, he stayed on for a while as an instructor before he turned to jazz full-time and moved back to New York City. Besides working with Nick Brignola, the pianist enjoyed plenty of sideman stints while also working in large ensembles like the HR Big Band in Frankfurt and the Stockholm Jazz Orchestra.

Since then, Holober's compositions and arrangements have earned him a reputation as one of New York's most respected jazz writers, with numerous jazz and classical ensembles performing and/or recording his works. Presently, he is associate director of the BMI Jazz Composers' Workshop, following in the steps of famed jazz writers like Bob Brookmeyer, Jim McNeely and the late Manny Albam.

For information about Mike Holober visit his website: www.mikeholober.com

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