



New Orleans Trombonist Jeff Albert Releases *Similar in the Opposite Way*, A High-Spirited and Experimental Quartet Exploration

Hurricane Katrina Profoundly Altered Course of Albert's Career, Led Trombonist to Explore the "New Orleans/Chicago Continuum"

In conjunction with **Fora Sound Records**, New Orleans-based trombonist and composer Jeff Albert is thrilled to announce the Jan. 20th 2009 release, *Similar in the Opposite Way* from the **Jeff Albert Quartet**. The ten tracks thrust New Orleans back toward the genre-busting sounds so firmly associated with its proud heritage as Albert and company explore and reconstruct the boundaries between improvisation and composition.

When we think of New Orleans and the music emanating from that great city, the term "experimental" does not leap immediately to mind. Albert and his quartet will change all that. Albert grew up in the tradition, as it were. "I was a real J.J. Johnson fan, and for me, it was hard-core bebop for a while." He also considers himself fortunate to perform with some of the artists that defined New Orleans' classic funk and Rhythm and Blues sounds. His appearance on recordings such as *Deacon John's Jump Blues* (alongside Dr. John, Allen Toussaint, and Wardell Quezergue), not to mention his work with **George Porter** and **Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown**, have given him invaluable insight into his city's rich heritage. He maintains that his music demonstrates a strong allegiance to his hometown, no matter how far out it may seem.

His musical vision expanded incrementally until the autumn of 2004, when his head was turned around at a Steve Swell Fire into Music performance. Similar in instrumentation if not in execution, the group afforded Albert a moment of evolution. Seeing the direction in which his music now lay, he formed the Jeff Albert quartet, recording the group's debut album, *One*, within eight weeks of the Swell concert. The quartet currently features saxophonist **Ray Moore**, drummer **Dave Cappello** and bassist **Tommy Sciple**. These events also proved to be the impetus for **Open Ears Music**, a Tuesday night concert series in New Orleans that hosts like-minded musicians from around the world. Albert claims influence from the Hungry Brain series in Chicago, whose aims and methods are similar.

Albert's connection to Chicago goes far beyond emulation. After Hurricane Katrina, he phoned up long-time friend **Jeb Bishop**, and the two of them agreed that Albert should come up and that they should form a group that joined New Orleans and Chicago forces. *The Lucky 7s* resulted, the self-titled debut released in 2006 to critical acclaim and a is second on the way later in 2009.

Similar in the Opposite Way brings what Albert labels the "New Orleans/Chicago continuum" into sharp focus. Albert insists that New Orleans is represented by the groove, and his assertion is born out by

the funky slam of a track like “Bag Full of Poboys.” Cappello kicks it into action, Albert, Moore and Sciple digging into the slinkily catchy head with tasty slides and occasional vibrato associated with such New Orleans veterans as Johnny Dodds and Kid Ory. Playing just around the beat, relaxed but swinging with high energy, there is nevertheless a certain coolness and reserve that invokes Ken Vandermark’s projects, or the various Chicago Underground groups in their more introspective moments. At the melody’s conclusion, dissonance takes over, Albert’s composition entering Vandermark 5 territory, but by the time the solos begin, overt reference takes a back seat. Each soloist brings years of experience to bear on a compositional language in which innovation and tradition coexist without the need for obvious cross-reference.

“Poboys” might be seen as a blueprint for the album, which is a showcase for Albert’s varied compositional vision. There’s no denying the deep swing of the title track as it conjures reminiscences of “Miles’ Mode.” Yet, the dual soloing of Albert and Moore often invokes Stravinskian counterpoint over the solid groove laid down by Sciple and Cappello, the latter jumping on the neoclassical bandwagon with a few well-timed excursions into march rhetoric. Stravinsky rears his head more obviously on the brief and rhythmically amorphous “Chalk and Chocolate.” “I was just Looking for my Pants” runs the gamut from polyrhythmic cross-talk to sparse pointilisms and long-drawn ghost-tones, traversing style with jump-cut precision and humor. Then, there are the gorgeous chamber-jazz musings of “Subtle Flower,” it’s head almost a chant-like reverie of unisons in a style that Albert likens to a sort of ballad. Particularly effecting is when Sciple and Moore double the melody in octaves as Albert intertwines contrapuntal passages of exquisite intricacy, eschewing the normal group/soloist hierarchy in favor of a more collective feel. Harmony is never overt, but implications abound, enhanced by Albert and Moore’s warmth of tone and varied articulation.

Despite the strikingly cosmopolitan nature of these compositions, Albert insists that he designed them for the players. “I wanted to provide settings to stimulate improvisations with the goal of maintaining musical interest and diversity over the course of a performance.” This he has done, as each piece conjures a world of expression and dynamism. It’s the musicians that make this music work, as they were integral to its conception. The symbiotic relationship between composer and group, both informed by multiple geographical and musical influences, is the reason the album’s title is so appropriate. The Jeff Albert quartet has fashioned a mature artistic statement that embraces tradition without ever being enslaved to it.

Jeff Albert blogs at <http://www.scratchmybrain.com> and his website is <http://www.jeffalbert.com>

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