

Program Notes

“Up Above My Head” is a traditional gospel song of unknown authorship that derives from the 19th century spiritual “Over My Head.” Several lyric phrases between both songs are the same (or similar)- “Over my head/I hear music in the air/There must be a God somewhere.” It was first recorded by an African American vocal group named The Southern Sons in 1941 under the title “Above My Head I Hear Music in the Air,” and then, in 1947 featuring Sister Rosetta Thorpe and Marie Knight (as “Up Above My Head I Hear Music in the Air) which has remained the most well-known version of the song. In 1997 multiple Grammy award winning gospel artist Kirk Franklin released his fourth album, God’s Property from Nu Nation. A new fresh take on the traditional gospel song was introduced by Myron Butler (b.1974), vocal director and co-founder of the Kirk Franklin Nu Nation movement and God’s Property choir. This arrangement and composition of “Up Above My Head” has always been a personal favourite of mine. It may be an ironic statement, however, the treatment of the vocal arrangement, harmonic progressions, and instrumentation creates a perfect fusion of Gospel and Jazz music. The irony is that without the traditions of Gospel music, we would not have jazz. One birthed out of the other.

“Out” is an anthem of sorts. It is a musical response to an audition I had completed, where I felt my validity as a musician was consistently challenged. It was then verbally determined by the panel that my tunes were not really jazz oriented. On the bus ride back to Montreal, I mentally reviewed the comments and proceeded to write, first hearing the bass ostinato introduction in my head, and building from that. Additionally, the lyrics are loosely inspired by vocalist and actor, Leslie Odom Jr’s book entitled **“Failing Up”**; how failure and criticism should not deter you, but drive your progress and determination while leveling up, as you continue to do the necessary work. The unsettling dissonance of the arpeggiated DbM9(#5) against the GbM7/F on the lyrics “falling upward to the sky” expresses the discomfort of that state of being, and the notion of moving upward, outward and forward. The 7/4 metered Outro is a declaration of wholeheartedly coming out, into new possibilities.

“Trippin” is what happens when you live in your head, and internal dialogue becomes your worst enemy; as the experienced or imagined perception of others is left to dictate the perception of self.

American jazz vibraphonist Robert “Bobby” Hutcherson’s (1941-2016) **“Little B’s Poem”** off of his 1966 album *“Components”* is one of his best well-known compositions. An ode to his son Barry in the form of a waltz, stating a melodic line that reminded Bobby of what it looked and felt like when he’d watch his child in the act of play. Lyrics were eventually added by Multi-instrumentalist, composer, and producer Doug Carn (b.1948), who would often write lyrics to original popular jazz instrumentals. These songs were sung by his then wife, vocalist Jean Carn, who he praised for her extensive 5 octave vocal range, as it gave him the freedom to choose any instrumental he wanted to lyricize. His arrangement of Little B’s Poem was released on the 1971 album *“Infant Eyes”* off of Black Jazz Records label- the first record label founded by an African American (Gene Russell with co-founder Dick Schory) since Sunshine Records in 1921. This arrangement by ‘the Carns’ commences with the fanfare of blaring horns, ring of cymbals from the drums, and a percussive scat “Ba-ba-ba ba-doo-ba, da-buh-doo-ba, da-bu-doo-ba.” Autoiographically announcing the joy that a child has brought into their lives, and how it equally was a joy when the son they expected to have, turned out to be a daughter.

“Babadeeyah” is a concept piece that expresses the conflict and discomfort I’ve experienced while growing in my ability to improvise, build DNA within the ‘jazz’ idiom, and develop a lexicon unique to myself yet familiar to what already exists. The term ‘babadeeyah’ oddly enough are default syllables I would often hear myself utter during vulnerable and distracted moments while improvising. The 12/8 ballad is pseudo lament to my thought processes.

“Calm” was conceived at the height of the pandemic, when panic of the unknown began to set in all around us. Although at first, the beginning product of a class assignment, this piece became an audible testament and remembrance of a tranquil moment in time. The goal was to explore composing a piece inspired by other art forms such as painting, architecture, and photography. My inspiration was two-fold: a photograph I had taken several years ago during the last days of a cruise ship contract in the Azores (Portugal). A beautiful, small chapel- **Chapel of Nossa Senhora das Vitórias** I had visited on Lagoa das Furnas (Furnas Lake) surrounded by trees, greenery, and deeply coloured flowers. This imagery coupled with the portion of a beloved melody from the 2nd movement (Game of Pairs) of Bela Bartok’s Concerto for Orchestra. The brass section in the middle of the movement remedies as a moment of serenity in the midst of bickering among the wind, string, and brass sections. I wanted to emulate that feeling of calm by introducing a ‘Gregorian chant like’ treatment of the vocals over a sparse, yet open accompaniment that leaves room to create a spiritual, sacred mood.

“Ups and Downs” This piece composed by the formidable improviser, and composer Carla Bley (born May 11, 1936) has clearly not been written for an instrument with no buttons to push. An exam piece for Prof. Remi Bolduc’s Graduate Jazz Improvisation Seminar, I took an extreme liking to the tune even though finding it very difficult to execute. The best way I could personalize it was by creating lyrics of my own to express just how challenging it was to sing and improvise on, yet in all its charm, had captured my affection.

“Life in Grey” began as an exercise in the familiarization on modes. In the case of LIG, my focus was to write a melody in Dorian and to then harmonize it. The harmonization executed in the [A] section uses Polychords; upper chords ascending chromatically over a Bb pedal, then descending chromatically over a Gb pedal. The [B] section is brighter in color as hope of better is implied. The lyrics added later to the melody, express the state of ‘being in between.’ Seeing a better future for oneself, grateful to be alive, but borderline depressed because it often feels as if the grass is greener for everyone else. Yet aware that if gratitude is exercised, no matter the circumstance, then there is always hope of living a life outside of emotional grey areas.

“Fighting the New” This title introduces the word ‘new’ as a noun, opposed to an adjective and expresses lyrically the difficulties faced when embracing change; all with the purpose of expanding oneself and creating new opportunities. With the Often the energy that the process of change brings feels like a struggle against oneself, but as well, a struggle against the narrative of the ones you love. However, determination must prevail, and the only way to do it is push through. Even when unsure of what that will look like.

“You’re a Joy” Written by jazz pianist, composer and arranger Tadd Dameron (1917-1965) was released (by Riverside Records) on his 1962 album “The Magic Touch,” Tadd Dameron and his Orchestra; sung by vocalist Barbara Winfield. As a pianist, and influential bebop arranger, he worked throughout the 1940’s and 1950’s with countless prominent jazz musicians and swing band leaders; Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Artie Shaw, Charlie Parker, and Dizzy Gillespie to name a few. For those familiar with his music, he is known for the lyricism of his melodies and the classical impressionist treatment of harmonies. For this reason tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon referred to him as the “Bebop Romanticist.” Although he has written quite a few bebop tunes that have become standards including ‘Lady Bird,’ ‘If You Could See Me Now,’ and ‘Hot House,’ there are still many who have yet to explore his music.

The lyrics of Tadd Dameron’s tune are written by the American songwriter Bernie Hanighen (1908-1967), who also penned the lyrics to Thelonius Monk’s jazz composition “Round Midnight.” Producing what has become a standard in the vocal canon due to interpretations by vocal artists the like of Sarah Vaughn, and Ella Fitzgerald. “You’re a Joy” speaks of the deep elation of being in love, or obsessed with a particular someone; and although at times there is the fear of losing oneself in the emotions and sensation of it all, the one they desire is worth it regardless of the outcome.

“Does Anybody Know” Originally written for a compilation album called Montreal Sound Resistance Chapitre I. A social justice recording project that came about as a response to the death of George Floyd and law enforcement brutality from the co-op record label Chromatic Audio. This song is dedicated to the

memory of Breonna Taylor and Elijah McClain. Upon learning of their lives lived, and the circumstances surrounding their deaths, it affected me in a very profound way. *Does Anybody Know* is the question I often ask myself as a person of colour, and the premise of a 'matter-of-fact' conversation I'd like to have regarding reoccurring injustice.

A coerced conversation between friends, "**Reconciliation Push**" is where underlying conflict exists for one, but the other is unaware, as they deal with their own personal issues. The unaware participant in the relationship is then roped into the challenge of resolving issues unforeseen. The introduction of the bass ostinato is tentative, but then remains steady in the midst of contemplation, engaging in conversations one party would rather not have with themselves or others, but all the while weighing the cost of preserving a meaningful friendship. Eventually facing the discomfort, and hashing it out in the most generous, and graceful way; energy dispersed, and anticipating what's next.