

Hooper and Criado fashion an infectiously funky cushion for Kitaev as they attack Thelonious Monk’s “Well You Needn’t” with extraordinary gusto. Reminds me of something Monk’s wife, Nell, told Time Magazine many years ago: “Sometimes at home I call him Melodious Thunk.” Well, this track is brimming with melodious thunks, but I defy anyone who’s alive to sit still while this version is playing. You couldn’t ask for greater contrast with the closer, Thad Jones’ lovely “A Child Is Born.” This was the waltz I referred to in the beginning. You tend to listen to it with hushed respect. Everyone in the studio was hushed: you can hardly make out Stix’s brushes; even Criado is restricted to pedal tones...very few independent lines. And how about that final pedal tone...isn’t that the longest-held note in jazz history? Think I’ll check with Guinness Book.

Harvey Siders, *Jazz Times*



I am delighted to pay musical homage to some of the greatest Jazz compositions ever written. These compositions by some of the premier Jazz musicians/composers are the stalwart fiber that has shaped, nurtured, perpetuated and provided a wonderful base for extemporaneous improvisation and exploration for musicians, educators and others. Hope you enjoy this project. It’s for those who may reminisce and also for those who are having their initial experience and discovery.

Stix Hooper, Producer

Please enjoy Stix’s homage and ardent interpretation of some of the greatest Jazz compositions ever written.

Gretchen Garth, Executive Producer

Special Acknowledgement:
To my G girl (Gretchen),

I want to express my sincere appreciation for the love, support, inspiration, encouragement and enthusiasm that is given to me from the pillar and love of my life. Her input helped to create a new positive chapter of my creativity, musical expression and has also given me a firm sense of responsibility and alignment to our world, our environment and humanity. Thanks, G.



Executive Producer, Gretchen Garth.
Engineered by Franz Pusch VR Sound Corp.
Recorded at MG Sound Studios, Vienna, Austria;
Additional recording – Staggy Street Studios, Van Nuys, California, USA; assistant engineer, David Mattix.
Mixed at Glenwood Sound Studios, Burbank, California, USA.
Mastering at Stephen Marsh Mastering, Hollywood, California, USA.
Graphic Design, Michele Zuzalek Design. Studio Photo by Franz Pusch.
Special Thanks to MG Sound Studios, Vienna, Austria, (Eva Bohm); Pearl Corporation/Pearl Europe/
Music Vidic, Stefan Alexa, Vienna, Austria; John DeChristopher, Tina Clark, Joe Baier, Zildjian;
Kit Rebhun and staff, Glenwood Place Studios, Burbank, California, USA.
Produced by Stix Hooper for Stix Hooper Enterprises.
Production Assistant, Brenda Vanderloop.
Stix Hooper uses Pearl Drums, Zildjian Cymbals and ProMark Drumsticks exclusively.



STIX HOOPER ENTERPRISES SHE3002

JAZZ GEMS

STIX HOOPER

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jazz gems

1. CARAVAN	5:12 - JUAN TIZOL, DUKE ELLINGTON, IRVING MILLS
2. FOOTPRINTS	6:32 - WAYNE SHORTER
3. GEE BABY AIN’T I GOOD TO YOU	4:37 - ANDY RAZAF AND DON REDMAN
4. JOY SPRING	7:23 - CLIFFORD BROWN
5. LAZY BIRD	2:53 - JOHN COLTRANE
6. LUSH LIFE	3:17 - BILLY STRAYHORN
7. MIDNIGHT SUN	5:52 - LIONEL HAMPTON, SONNY BURKE, JOHNNY MERCER
8. NARDIS	5:07 - MILES DAVIS
9. NIGHT IN TUNISIA	5:49 - JOHN BIRKS “DIZZY” GILLESPIE, FRANK PAPARELLI
10. CEORA	4:09 - LEE MORGAN
11. STOLEN MOMENTS	3:36 - OLIVER NELSON
12. SWAHILILAND	3:40 - AHMAD JAMAL
13. WELL YOU NEEDN’T	2:39 - THELONIOUS MONK
14. A CHILD IS BORN	4:12 - THAD JONES



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Musicians: STIX HOOPER - Drums/Percussion • ANDREI KITAEV - Piano • AL CRIADO - Bass

Jazz is Universal

by Harvey Siders, *Jazz Times*

So an American, a Russian and a Cuban walk into this bar in Vienna. Now that may sound like the template for a predictably corny joke, but it actually happened in the Austrian capital, when Stix Hooper, Andrei Kitaev, and Al Criado finished an intense recording session, and the only item left on their agenda was a relaxing post mortem on the recorded experiment destined to be called *Jazz Gems*.

Every recording date – every gig, for that matter – is an experiment for musicians. Notes on a staff, mutually agreed tempos, key changes, phrasing, cut-offs, etc., all involve the art of communication. You would think that the simultaneity of English, Russian and Spanish might create obstacles. Think again: what we have here has been translated into the universal language of jazz.

That concept – the universal language of music – has been the driving force behind Stix Hooper’s electric and eclectic career that began with the formation of the prophetically named Jazz Crusaders, a name that the visionary Stix realized was too limiting. As The Crusaders, he and the combo toured the globe, earning enough Grammy nominations to cover the walls of Stix Hooper Enterprises. Playboy and Down Beat polls eventually listed Hooper as one of the world’s “top three drummers.” In a profession where success can be measured by hyphens, Stix has proven his expertise as drummer-percussionist-composer-arranger-vocalist-record producer. Can he afford to slow down? Yes, but he won’t, Stix has added one more hyphen to his laurels: worldwide mover-shaker.

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In the CD contained herein, joined by the Russian-born pianist, Andrei Kitaev, and Cuban-born Al Criado, on bass, Stix has produced a masterpiece of chamber jazz: a session of mostly first takes (considering the challenges these 14 standards by jazzdom’s most brilliant minds represent, that’s an astonishing revelation). There were intimate “conversations” among three minds from three different cultures, swinging their foreign fannies off – on neutral ground – carefully listening while improvising, using ESP to respond instantly to each other’s quirks. The result: an hour and a quarter of superb modern music encompassing jazz, blues, funk, straight-ahead swing, even a gorgeous waltz. It’s what the international medium of jazz is all about.

YOU WANT HIGHLIGHTS? THEY’RE ON EVERY TRACK, SO LET’S VISIT A FEW.

The very first sound you’ll hear, a drum roll, typifies Hooper’s production values. With pitched drums, Stix lays down a repetitious 3-note pattern that sets the mood for “Caravan.” When Andrei begins with his own roll (technically, a tremolo) it contains a flatted fifth that persists throughout his statement of the melody. Sounds simple, but don’t try it at home. It reveals his thorough classical background. The rest of the track is quite a showcase for Hooper, the percussionist.

“Footprints” also begins with an ostinato...a repeated short phrase, this time by bassist Criado. But the ending is more fascinating. It sounds like three simultaneous cadenzas. What I said about Kitaev’s strict classical upbringing comes into focus again, in reverse, for “Gee Baby Ain’t I Good to You.” True, he graduated from his prestigious Moscow college by performing Rachmaninov’s fiendishly difficult Second Piano Concerto. But Andrei’s rendition of “Gee Baby” is down and dirty, maintaining a gutsy blues feeling throughout. Clifford Brown’s “Joy Spring” is the type of swinger that jazz players thrive on: frequent adventurous changes leading to frequent adventurous modulations. Al Criado takes a great solo over Hooper’s subtle work on cymbals. At the end of his solo, the bassist plays a delicious lick that seems to say, “Your turn, man.” When Stix plays, it’s more than a solo; it’s a master class in drum schticks. (Hmm, Schticks Hooper.) By the way, I don’t mean to suggest that Criado’s bass has a better sense of humor than Al. Stix told me when the bassist arrived in Vienna he told me “I’m so happy to be here. Just think...I can buy Cuban cigars without getting arrested.”

The Coltrane line, “Lazy Bird,” is what musicians refer to as a “barn-burner,” considering the supersonic tempo it’s taken at. The only time a group should play that fast is when they’re double parked at a gig. Notice how cleanly it’s executed. Doesn’t mean you should try dancing to it. Now there are a couple of ballads for which the metronome was set at “reverent.” It’s nearly impossible to improve upon the melody and harmonies of a Billy Strayhorn tune. So Kitaev wisely chose not to as he lavishes his respect on Sweet Pea’s “Lush Life.” Al could have phoned in his bass part, but it turns out that less is more in this instance: with his firm intonation, the re-harmonized root tones prove integral. While Strayhorn’s Cabaret-like rubato intro renders a formal intro expendable, it’s quite the opposite in Andrei’s approach to “Midnight Sun.” He plays an intro to its bridge. Nice touch, in more ways than one: he knows how to make love to a melody. Some musicians claim every tune has its own ideal tempo. If that be true, whoever kicked off Miles’ cooker “Nardis” found its perfect speed. Listen carefully to Stix’s solo: he found the ideal interplay between sticks on snare and foot on bass drum. A couple of Latinized classics: Dizzy’s “Night in Tunisia” and Lee Morgan’s side-winding “Ceora.” While “Tunisia” is traditionally interpreted as half African beat and half jazz, the trio con brio takes it slightly slower. No matter how you approach “Ceora, it’s difficult to diminish the lushness of its melody. The bounce of Criado’s bass and the play of Stix’s brushes puts it in a sensuous Latin aura.

“Stolen Moments,” by Oliver Nelson is one of those charts that, like “Joy Spring,” jazzmen like to play. There’s a saying by many cats that certain lines “lay well,” meaning they’re intelligently and logically crafted and harmonically a pleasure to improvise on. “Stolen Moments” is one such. Ahmad Jamal writes like the pianist he is. His “Swahiliiland” is a challenge and has to be conducted, even if by facial expressions. What Stix accomplishes is amazing: after a series of tempo shifts and a brief section where Andrei gets bi-tonal, Stix sets up an interlude of funk over a persistent bass drum figure. When he comes out of it, he plays an even faster solo bass drum figure with the left foot and superimposed an apparently unrelated flurry with both sticks. How’d he do that?

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