



Stefon Harris and Blackout

Present

URBANUS

Released on Concord Jazz

28th September 2009



Widely recognized by both peers and critics alike for his passionate artistry, energetic stage presence, and astonishing virtuosity, **Stefon Harris** is committed to both exploring the rich potential of jazz composition and blazing new trails on the vibraphone and marimba.

In 2004 Harris unveiled **Blackout**, a project featuring a hybrid of acoustic music and progressive sounds, and released 'Evolution' on Blue Note. **Urbanus**, Harris' debut for Concord Records and 7th recording as leader, features that same scintillating ensemble that's as versed in modern jazz as it is with the rhythms, melodies and soundscapes associated with R&B, pop, hip-hop and funk.

These days, Blackout displays a deeper group rapport as well as a more expansive sonic palette; **Marc Cary** complements his acoustic piano sound with Fender Rhodes, while alto saxophonist **Casey Benjamin** lends his captivating vocoder work to the proceedings. Harris' brilliance at broadening textures and colours comes to play with his sensational woodwind and string arrangements on a few of the compositions as well. Other members of Blackout include **Ben Williams** on bass and **Terreon Gulley** on drums.

"When you have the opportunity to work with people for several years and you're all on the same page, what comes out is something that you could not predict," Harris says of Blackout's artistic growth. "It's what keeps us together as an ensemble. I think we really inspire one another."

The album's title, *Urbanus* is Latin for "urban," a word chosen to convey the origins of the band members and jazz itself. "We all come from urban environments" says Harris, "and the origins of [jazz] have always been from urban centres where you have a confluence of cultures which synthesize in urban environments."

"Music is about authenticity, telling your story and sharing real-life stories that are from the 'here and now,' not just about the past," he says of the Blackout's group philosophy. Yet Harris does not shirk the jazz tradition as evidenced by the inclusion of *Gone*, an ingenious variation on George Gershwin's 'Gone, Gone, Gone' from *Porgy & Bess*, and Jackie McLean's hard bop classic, 'Minor March'. Indeed, Harris exhibits tremendous reverence and understanding of jazz history.

Other inclusions show Harris' philosophy of also playing the music of his contemporaries - the gentle ballad *Christina* - composed by legendary bassist Buster Williams, who was one of Harris' significant mentors - and a fantastic makeover of Stevie Wonder's early-'70s song *They Won't Go (When I Go)*.



Urbanus also includes superb originals by Harris himself (*Blues for Denial*, *Langston's Lullaby*) as well as other Blackout members Marc Cary, (*Afterthought*), Terreon Gully (*Tanktified*) and Benjamin (*For You* (co-written by drummer Sameer Gupta)).

“One of the biggest indicators of our growth as a band is the level of contribution from all the members of the ensemble,” Harris enthuses. “The music not only incorporates all of our writing but everyone’s cultural backgrounds as well.”

Recorded just a few days before the historic presidential inauguration of Barack Obama, *Urbanus* sparkles with optimism, ingenuity and emotional immediacy. “How could it not?” Harris says when asked if the anticipation of the inauguration had an impact on the sessions. “Being in the studio, knowing that we were getting ready for the inauguration of the first African-American president – how could that not change my life? I was extremely inspired and that created a great feeling of audacity and some fantastic energy.”

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