

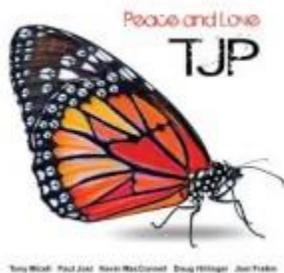


<http://jazzineurope.mfmmedia.nl/2017/10/tjp-spreading-peace-and-love/>

TJP, spreading Peace and Love

A few years ago I was presented with a CD by Philadelphia based band The Jost Project. The CD titled “Can’t Find My Way Home” included jazz interpretations of rock/pop classics including Iron Butterfly’s “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida” Aerosmith’s “Walk This Way” and Led Zeppelin’s “Kashmir”. I was immediately struck by the creativity of the arrangements and the quality of the performances, in fact I realised I was purely listening to the music without once mentally referring back to the original. ♦

- Oct 20, 2017
- Nigel J.
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- Joel Frahm, Kevin MacConnell, Paul Jost, The Jost Project, TJP, Tony Miceli
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- The seeds for the formation of the band were planted with vibraphonist Tony Miceli's 2005 recording "Hippie Jazz". Not long after the vocalist Paul Jost was added to the line-up and the Jost Project was a fact.

Earlier this year the band shortened their name from “The Jost Project” to the initials TJP and returned to the studio to record their 2nd album. On the eve of the release of the new CD “Peace and Love” I had the opportunity to speak with the band to discuss their approach to re-arranging this repertoire, reaching new audiences and what’s to come.

Nigel J. Farmer: For our readers that may not be familiar with the band, give us a little history as to how the band came together and where the concept came from?

Tony Miceli: The idea came after listening to Elvin Jones playing at the Mellon Jazz Festival. They played over one chord for about 35 minutes and it was incredible. I thought to myself, that’s what rock bands do. That was the beginning of using rock tunes as my standards. I had Kevin (*MacConnell -ed*) and a drummer come over to my house week after week and we would sketch out rock tunes. We would learn them and keep what sounded good and discard anything that didn’t crossover well.

I had many versions of the band. It wasn’t until Paul Jost came along that I thought, this is it exactly. It was the complete picture for me and the best band until this point. Paul brought it all together. Paul was very busy and wasn’t sure he had the time to put into this. Kevin and I made this our project, to convince him to put in time with the band. He finally agreed and we started rehearsing about 5 or so years ago.

Nigel J. Farmer: The band was formally known as The Jost Project however now known as TJP. Why the change?

Tony Miceli: In our earliest band meetings we were talking about the pluses of calling the band “The Jost Project”. Kevin and I had made it our “project” to get Paul to agree to be part of the band. One of the pluses we thought was that Jost was easy to pronounce and that was a good thing. You try things and nobody seems able to pronounce Paul’s surname correct, live n’ learn. TJP is easy so it seemed we should head in that direction with this name and not worry about pronouncing it correctly.

Nigel J. Farmer: There have been many attempts over the years by jazz musicians to take pop repertoire and give this a jazz treatment, some successful, some not so. In the bands promotional material I hear the word “re-imagine” used a great deal. What is your approach to rearranging this repertoire and to what extent is it re-imagined?

Tony Miceli: Re-imagine is a silly way to say, ‘Let’s do what jazz musicians have been doing all along’. In the 40’s and 50’s jazz musicians took pop music and reworked it or re-imagined it. That’s what we’re doing. I imagine the success rate is the same. Some songs translate well and some songs don’t. It’s the same thing now. You listen to people reworking pop tunes and you like this group and not that group. Some songs really lend themselves well.

Paul Jost: I don’t know what makes one arrangement more successful than another but what I always want to do is honor the original song. I think an arranger should be allowed a blank canvas and the license to paint whatever picture they see. That being said, I don’t like it when I can barely tell what the song is that’s being “re-imagined”. Altering harmonically or melodically (and even the form) is fine with me, but when there are only fragments of the original left it just

leaves me puzzled. My goal is simply to try and capture what I envision and then hope it vibrates a thread with the listener. For me, the most defining element of jazz is the improvisational aspect. One approach is to frame the song with specific arranging ideas that shape the intent and then open it up to blowing sections so that the improvising side has a chance to be expressed. Hopefully the end result is a balance of a creative re-imagining of the original song that then opens onto “in the moment” creativity. I want the listener to be exposed to a painting that’s both inside and outside the lines. It’s how I hope to carry the listener across the gaps between “popular” music and jazz.

Another approach is when a story line hits me in a way that triggers an interpretation from another point of view. Say in the case of “Bridge Over Troubled Water” from our first CD called “Can’t Find My Way Home”. I found myself compelled to approach the lyric not as an offer of help or a “bridge over troubled water” but as a bridge that was hard if not impossible to see, navigate or even know. I had Hurricane Katrina in mind and I thought we’d let a lot of people down with our inability to mobilize relief or the sensitivity to heal. I end the arrangement whistling the motif and, in my mind, it represents government and corrupt business turning their backs and whistling off into the distance.

“Hush” (on our new CD) is another approach where I’m just responding to what feels right. The feel is a kind of even eighth latin/funk vibe in 3/4 and 5/8. The groove came from guitar (where I do a lot of my arranging). While I was playing, these two harmonics would emerge. They don’t really “belong” to the chord, but the muse said they did and who am I to argue? Tony pulls them out great on the vibes and it just becomes a “thing”. The song again opens onto improvisation and when you have two great musicians and improvisers like Tony Miceli and Joel Frahm, well you strike gold every time.

So there are three examples of my approach to “re-imagining”. In the end the most important thing is to stay open. If you do that the arrangement pretty much writes itself. You just have to learn how to stay out of the way. I constantly remind myself something that Johnny Mandel said was the singularly most important thing he ever learned about arranging and that is to “write what you hear”.

Nigel J. Farmer: When working out a new arrangement, Is anything sacred?

Paul Jost: I want to say no, I really do, but in my heart of hearts there are some things I’d never touch. Well, I would if called upon to, but you know there are things by Mandel I think I’d only mutilate. On the classic rock side, there are things by Hendrix that I just feel like it’d be sacrilegious to mess with. Look everyone has their own things they hold close, you know? I was commissioned to do a jazz “re-imagining” of Springsteen’s iconic album “Born to Run” and I’m really happy with the way it turned out. I recorded it live at The Bitter End and did a few concerts with a killer band and people embraced it and responded so favorably. But, of course, someone wrote that it was too bad I ruined one of the tunes, I forget which one, but for that person what I did was sacrosanct.

Tony Miceli: I’ll just mention here that I love the differences between Paul’s arrangements and mine. I strip everything down and most of the time treat it exactly like it’s a jazz standard. Melody and chords. Paul, I think, sees a picture and vision of the tune and comes up with the

most amazing arrangements of these tunes. Whiter Shade of Pale was really difficult for me to arrange. Paul took it and made a masterpiece out of it.

Nigel J. Farmer: having played some major festivals both in the USA and Asia, I'm interested to know how this material has been received by the audiences? Do you think that performing songs that everyone knows helps to expand the bands reach outside of the regular jazz audience?

Kevin MacConnell: That's exactly what happens with some of our arrangements of Beatles songs or Aerosmith's "Walk This Way" the audience reacts to these songs and they're into it! In South Korea, we couldn't believe how the crowds cheered, college students and kids in their 20's. We have this 'half time' swing section of "Walk This Way" that's a great audience participation section at the end of the arrangement where Paul keeps repeating the chorus.... and the audience chimes in and they get it and look (certainly respond) like they're having fun. The three of us grew up with the rock tunes and this is specifically the reason we have chosen this material as our repertoire and vehicles for our expression, in hopes that other baby boomers, who are not jazz fans, will hear our arrangements, recognize the tunes and be open to how we have presented them, broadening their aural palette and hopefully planting the seed for future jazz fans.

Nigel J. Farmer: Peace and Love is your second album following up on "Can't Find My Way Home" a number of years back. Your first album was full of hit's from the 60's and 70's. I've noticed the material choice on this album includes some lessor known material. How do you go about choosing the material and how much impact does the original version have on the re-arrangement?

Paul Jost: Well the "Peace and Love" concept for the album was Tony's and he and I just looked through tunes and grabbed what hit us. I think some tunes speak directly to the atmosphere of the 60's and 70's while growing up in the turmoil and the redefining ("re-imagining") of so many things in our society. Songs like "Get Together", "America", "Put a Little Love in Your Heart", "Time of the Season" are great examples. Others like "Hush", "Whiter Shade of Pale" and "Tuesday Afternoon" are like sonic bookmarks asking, "where were you when...?"

Nigel J. Farmer: On this album you've included Joel Frahm as guest on saxophone. What motivated this choice and will Joel be performing live with the band?

Tony Miceli: We have talked about 5th pieces for the band. It helps with solos and expands our sound of course. Joel has ears that listen and figure out exactly what's needed and then plays just that. He's not a show off, unless the music calls for it. Keep in mind, he went to high school and practiced with Brad Mehldau. That should explain a lot. Joel was perfect for this CD.

Paul Jost: Joel Frahm is just flat out one of the best musicians and improvisers on the scene. He's everywhere. Seems like he's on everybody's record and for good reason. He just knows exactly what to play no matter the music. He can be angular, soulful, cerebral, organic...it just doesn't matter. He's got all the chops in the world and at the same time can just slay you with one perfectly placed note AND (as always seems to be the case) he's like the nicest

cat in the world. I LOVE what he does and what he brings to our band musically, plus he gives us instant credibility. Hats off to Joel Frahm for helping make our music speak as well as it does. Believe me, there are a lot of people sitting around saying, “Know what this record needs?....Joel Frahm”

Nigel J. Farmer: With the world in the state that it currently is Peace and Love would seem like an appropriate theme. Was this the concept behind the album?

Tony Miceli: yes we named the cd before the elections. It seems the world wants isolation. It seems the U.S. does. It seems the U.S. wants to not talk, not have empathy, not listen, not behave and not worry about other people and their lives. I thought we need Peace and Love. This is what the 60’s were about. So... what happened to all those hippies? Why aren’t they standing up for Peace and Love in their old age. And where are the young people. The time is ripe for another revolution I think. Our CD asks those questions and is a call to action.

Nigel J. Farmer: I believe a number of years ago you did a project with Temple University’s Big Band. For the project a number of your arrangements from the first album were re-worked for Big Band. Do you have any plans for arranging the Peace and Love set for Big Band?

Kevin MacConnell: We love working with Big Bands. We actually worked and performed a concert with the band from the University of the Arts and had some of our colleagues arrange several of our songs for that concert. It was a huge success! We did a similar program with West Chester University. We are always open to doing these kinds of programs but what we actually had in mind for the “Peace and Love” material, is to have it arranged for a chamber orchestra of strings and woodwinds and have talked to one of our colleagues about that. So, stay tuned!

Nigel J. Farmer: The band is very popular on the festival and club circuit in the USA and has toured Asia. Apart from a performance at the Limerick Jazz Festival in Ireland we have not seen the band live in Europe. Are there any plans to tour Europe in the near future?

Tony Miceli: I have been playing in Europe on and off for about 25 years now. I’ve been going quite a bit during the last 10 years. I would love to bring TJP over to perform and we’re working on it. The 60’s in the U.S. are of interest everywhere on the globe. It was amazing that Koreans knew all the music we were playing! I know we tap into a much much wider audience than a jazz audience and I think with exposure in Europe we would build a large fan base for our music.

Nigel J. Farmer: What can the fans expect from TJP in the near future?

Kevin MacConnell: As I mentioned before, the music is always well received! We will look to perform the material from both CD’s here and abroad, hopefully more festival and concert venues. As we move ahead, we’ll explore more ideas for arrangements of tunes and we’ll check them out as we’ve done in the past...some of them make the ‘performance list’ some don’t. It’s a process and you can certainly expect to hear more classic rock from the 60’s and 70’s...That works for us!

TJP released their new CD “Peace and Love” today. The is currently available at [Bandcamp](#). For our East Coast American readers the band will be playing tonight (20 Oct) at [Chris’ Jazz Cafe](#) in Philadelphia and on tomorrow (21 Oct) at the [Dear Head Inn](#). More information on TJP available at the artist [website](#).