

TRAVIS WESLEY'S CYCLE BY THREE, A FRESH AND MODERN JAZZ PIANO TRIO CD, RELEASED BY MADELINE RECORDS AUGUST, 2013

A Press Release By Scott Yanow

The piano-bass-drums trio has been given new life in jazz in recent years by the Bad Plus, Brad Mehldau and the late Esbjorn Svensson in EST. While Travis Wesley's previous CD *Natural Diversion* paid tribute to such pianists as Red Garland, Wynton Kelly, Erroll Garner and Ahmad Jamal, *Cycle By Three* is a giant step forward. His playing is strikingly original and his interplay with bassist Toby Curtright and drummer Tom Marko during a program filled with colorful originals is consistently impressive.

"The music crosses over several genres," says Wesley, "and I hope that it will be attractive not just to jazz enthusiasts but to many others. We wanted to modernize the sound of the piano trio, break some rules and display our own artistic voices. Drummer Tom Marko is very supportive, solid, and his musical comments are tasty and stylistically appropriate. Toby Curtright's approach to the bass lies somewhere between the sounds of Scott LaFaro and Jaco Pastorius. His sound is perfect for this group's concept." Many of the selections have Wesley's left hand and bassist Curtright stating the melodies together, giving the group an easily identifiable sound.

The pianist contributed six pieces to *Cycle By Three*. "Prelude" and "Postlude" bookend the set with identical themes (based off of Chopin's "Prelude in E Minor #4") that are interpreted in different ways. "Keeper Of Keys" has a melody line inspired by Bach, a floating quality and a backbeat that brings the piece to a climax. "Fading Friends" features the creative use of a hip hop groove that is soulful, joyful and a bit funky while still including a lot of improvisation. "Song For Madelynne" (dedicated to Wesley's daughter) is the longest piece of the set. It has a catchy background and a creative drum solo by Marko. "Memoriam" is a hyper and inventive performance dedicated to Esbjorn Svensson and EST.

Bassist Toby Curtright brought in two songs that are also on *Cycle By Three*. Both works, "But He Himself Was Broken" and "For Us, This Is The End Of All Stories," are instrumentals that have religious themes. The former uses Curtright's bowed bass and repetitious figures from the piano very effectively while the latter is a ballad that is reminiscent of Pat Metheny in its harmonies. Also included on *Cycle By Three* is a lyrical, modernized and quietly emotional version of the Rodgers & Hart classic "Spring Is Here."

Travis Wesley was born and raised in Bloomington, Illinois. He began taking piano lessons when he was ten and, although he was most interested in classic rock at the time, he soon discovered jazz through his piano teacher. "Jazz is where I come from. The commitment and artistry that it takes to be able to play it is a lifelong pursuit. It is the deepest form of artistic expression that there is."

Wesley attended the Berklee College of Music for a year, earned a Bachelors degree in music from Eastern Illinois University, completed his Masters in 2005 and recently earned his doctorate. Wesley worked with saxophonist Willie Akins in St. Louis during 2004-05, became a well respected educator and has led his own groups for years in addition to appearing with some of the top musicians of the Midwest.

While Travis Wesley's playing on 2012's *Natural Diversion* showed his roots, *Cycle By Three* displays his individuality and creativity. This colorful and inventive set points the way towards the piano trio of the future.

Press release written by Scott Yanow, author of ten books including *The Jazz Singers*, *Trumpet Kings*, *Jazz On Film*, *Jazz On Record 1917-76* & *The Great Jazz Guitarists: The Ultimate Guide*