

CHRISTIAN SCOTT *REWIND THAT*

One of the brightest jazz stars to emerge in the last few years is trumpeter **Christian Scott**. He makes his **Concord Jazz** debut with *Rewind That*, arguably the most remarkable premiere the genre has seen in the last decade. Instead of retreading bebop the way so-called young lions did in the early 1990s, Scott delivers a smart, grooved, and plugged-in set of tunes (nine of the 11 tracks are originals) with his electric sextet. Steeped in the jazz tradition and intent on participating in the music's evolution, the New York-based Berklee College of Music grad is indeed a significant new voice poised to make an impact on the future of jazz.

Scott is a natural. Only 22, the trumpeter has both the tone and the conviction of the great players of his instrument. He eschews cliché and gimmickry in favor of an expressive sensibility and a willingness to break rules when it makes musical sense to him. A New Orleans native, Scott represents the next generation of Crescent City horn blowers whose lineage started with the legendary King Oliver and Louis Armstrong and has continued with such marquee trumpeters as Wynton Marsalis, Terence Blanchard, and Nicholas Payton.

“I set out to find my own style to convey how I feel in my heart. I’m not thinking about how many bebop licks I can play,” says Scott, who not only won over crowds in performances back home, but also made a name for himself on the road playing with his uncle, renowned alto saxophonist Donald Harrison, Jr. That gig started when he was 16. “Donald taught me how important it is to be identifiable. He also warned me not to listen to many of the trumpet players who are playing today so I wouldn’t sound like them.”

Instead, Scott has developed his own distinctive and compelling trumpet voice: a breathy tone that has more in common with the way Ben Webster played the tenor saxophone than the piercing, clarion call the trumpet usually delivers. “It took me two years of concentration to come up with that tone,” says Scott, who got technique pointers from veteran horn player Clark Terry. “Apparently Clifford Brown figured out a way to play the trumpet to get that sound, even though there are no recordings of him doing it. Instead of blowing cold air into the instrument, Clifford squeezed out warm air from his diaphragm that created a more breathy tone. I like it because it makes the trumpet sound like the human voice.”

Scott hooked up with Concord Music Group on the recommendation of a distributor who witnessed the trumpeter and his band packing the Virgin Megastore in Boston with standing-room-only crowds of excited young adults. Scott sent the label a copy of his self-released, self-titled 2002 album. “They loved it,” Scott recalls. At the time, no one at Concord knew that Scott was Harrison’s nephew.

While Scott lists all the great jazz trumpeters — Armstrong, Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespie, Freddie Hubbard — as influences, he singles out Miles Davis as his “main guy.” “Miles started out a bopper, but one day he decided to take a different direction and not be so flashy in his playing,” Scott says. “He decided to edit himself, to feel what he was thinking. What he doesn’t play is just as great as what he does play. I saw a video recently of him playing, and you could see in his face that he was editing each note he played.”

Joining Scott on his Concord launch are guitarist Matt Stevens (“Matt is bad,” Scott says, “and he’s playing riffs that I composed because nine times out of 10 the guitar is the focal point of my compositions”); Walter Smith III on tenor saxophone; Zaccai Curtis on Fender Rhodes and Wurlitzer; Luques Curtis on bass; and Thomas Pridgen on drums (“He plays hard as if Art Blakey has been born in 1983,” says Scott. “He’s a volcano and he pushes. I need that.”). Guesting on four tracks is Harrison.

Most of the songs on *Rewind That* are based on themes and variations. “Everyone wanted me to do a straight-ahead album,” explains Scott, “but that’s like meeting a woman and trying to be like her last boyfriend. You’ve got to be special.”

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And special Scott is as he revs up with the driving title track, based on guitar and bass lines and spiced with dissonant harmonies on the bridge. That's followed by the highly charged "Say It," an intense, odd-metered response to a racist experience. Next up is the subtly funky "Like This," a tune Scott wrote for a woman he was dating. "This is so killing," he says. "It's based on a groove from a song on a Brandy album. It's the only song in a major key on the album. I wanted to write a song for slow dancing."

Many of the other songs on *Rewind That* are based on the ups and downs of friendships and relationships. The quiet, close-to-the-heart "Rejection" was written when Scott and his girlfriend broke up over the phone when he was touring in Spain. The solos in the piece are designed to capture the feel of the conversation, with Smith providing the tenor sax rise and fall into anger and Scott responding with a soft I-understand. "She" is about the "perfect girl" who didn't work out and was composed as a romance reminiscing about the "honeymoon stage of our relationship," and "Lay in Vein," with its funky guitar line, was written to pay homage to a female childhood friend who ended up OD'ing on drugs.

Two originals are about family. The urgent, driving "Suicide" is a three-horn attack inspired by Scott's mother's rare disease that was diagnosed a little over a year ago. "My mother is alive, but this disease she has causes such unbearable pain that some people who have it commit suicide," says Scott. "This tune is a vehicle to raise awareness of it." He also notes that the three solos in the piece aren't just blowing parts but are representations of three people afflicted with the disease. Then there's "Kiel's Theme (Song for My Brother)," an upbeat, playful swing with dark Wurlitzer undertones about Scott's twin brother who is a visual artist. "Kiel is amazing and is ten-times more talented with his art than I am with my trumpet. This is my musical representation of how Kiel's brain works," Scott says, then adds with a laugh, "It's also about how he loves funk, but is also the only black dude I know who can't dance. That's why his nickname is Boogie, because he can't."

Scott includes two covers. The upbeat, energized rendition of Miles's "So What" was an impromptu add to the recording session. "We were just messing around in the studio the day Donald came in to join us," says Scott. "This was a funky warm-up for him. It was so much fun to do." Scott also recorded one of his uncle's tunes, the heartfelt "Paradise Found," treated to a drum and bass beat, electronica effects and ending with a moving trumpet-tenor sax dialogue.

Perhaps the tune with the boldest statement on *Rewind That* is Scott's "Caught Up," which used to be titled "Risk." It's funky and rock-influenced. While Scott and his band play this "fast and hardcore" on the road, here it's slowed down and mysteriously intriguing. "This, as well as many of the other songs on his album, is going to surprise some people who like my playing but want me to play it straight," says Scott, who chooses not to name names. "Originally I called this "Risk" because I felt like what I was doing was putting my head on the chopping block when it comes to the jazz traditionalists. But I'm influenced by the lot of different kinds of music and my solos reflect all my life experiences. That's why I changed the title of this song to "Caught Up." With this album, now I'm going to be caught showing who I really am."

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