

# Larry Goldings/Peter Bernstein / Bill Stewart

## RAMSHACKLE SERENADE

### Pirouet Press Release

Pirouet Records · PIT3077

### Beauty has many layers

**Larry Goldings, Peter Bernstein, and Bill Stewart—three musicians with great ears; organ, guitar, and drums—a lineup rich in tradition—makes for passionate, grooving, highly sophisticated music. And the music is as cryptic as the CD’s title: *Ramshackle Serenade*.**

This is music you can fall right into. It catches you in its warm sound bed. And as you lie there you can enjoy the many fine details: particulars that are the results of some 25 years of collaboration between these three musicians — musicians who happen to be among the best on their respective instruments. Hammond organist (and pianist) Larry Goldings, guitarist Peter Bernstein, and drummer Bill Stewart are an extraordinary team. Here you have everything that the traditional “organ trio” (organ, guitar, and drums) has to offer—exciting grooves, rich, tasty, sumptuous sounds. But the music on this PIROUET CD also has an unusual, subtly intoned intimacy. With their exploitation of the music’s dynamic possibilities, the passion and joy of this amazingly versatile instrumental lineup is there for all to hear. At the same time there is a depth in *Ramshackle Serenade* that transforms the joy of playing into an exclamation of life.

“Ramshackle”— tumbledown, derelict, dilapidated. “Ramshackle” was the word Mark Twain used to describe the broken-down shack on the bank of the Mississippi in which the boy who was the model for Huckleberry Finn lived. Larry Goldings, who composed the title piece, says, “As I was looking for a title for the song, I thought about Mark Twain — I don’t know exactly why. Maybe I felt there was a bit of Americana in the piece. As I was busy with Twain, I came across the word ‘ramshackle’, which seemed to fit to the spirit of the piece. There is this melodic counter-movement that appears to continually peel away, and the piece has something fragile about it. But it is also lyrical, so it seems totally appropriate

to contrast it with a word like ‘serenade’. We all wanted it as the album’s title. I think that sometimes we as a band let feelings of dissolution and chaos meet up with strength and beauty. It’s fun to take something beautiful and harmonically and rhythmically turn

it around so that certain darker shadows mix in. Tension is crucial when you want to make good music.”

The trio’s music is as lively and rich in imagery as the for- going narrative — and as nuanced. It is multidimensional. Maybe that should be taken for granted when such strong musical personalities get together. Although Larry Goldings composed the title piece, he understands that this trio has three leaders. He talks about “collaborative leadership”; “We have developed a group sound in a completely natural way instead of having a sound that is dominated by the or- gan. Maybe it’s because of the respect we have for one another as musicians with strong personalities.”

The trio members are among the strongest musical person- alities of their generation. Born in Boston Massachusetts in 1968, Larry Goldings has made lush, funky, bluesy, expres- sive music as well as attempted freer explorations in jazz with the likes of Maceo Parker, John Scofield and Jack DeJohnette. Born in Des Moines Iowa in 1966, Bill Stewart has worked with Joe Lovano and Dave Holland, and, like Goldings, has worked with Maceo Parker and John Scofield (albeit not at the same time). Stewart has recorded a CD under his own name, *Incandescence*, for Pirouet. The album features Larry Goldings and pianist Kevin Hays, and was lauded by the press. Born in New York City, Peter Bernstein has worked with such diverse musician as Diana Krall, Lee Konitz, Roy Hargrove, and Brad Mehldau.

He is one of the most versatile and in-demand guitarists on the world scene. Originally he studied piano and then switched to guitar at the age of 13. His precise and melodi- cally sensitive play was highlighted by no less than the great guitarist Jim Hall. After having performed concerts with him in the 90’s, Bernstein extoled Hall as “the most impressive guitarist” he had ever heard.

The moment you first hear the trio you sense the deep respect the musicians have for one another. Bill Stewart says about the others, “Pete is one of those improvisers who really comes right to the point; his solos are full of superb melodies. Larry hears everything. He’s incredibly quick and responds to everything that happens in the mu- sic.” Goldings calls Stewart “one of the greatest drummers in jazz”, and finds that when he is playing with his partners, his organ stool is “one of the best seats in the house”.

The trio’s music has the special advantage that competition between the players is

never an issue. No one wants to impress; rather, the other two listen as intently as possible and then create a harmonious whole. And that is exactly what you hear—as in Horace Silver’s classic, *Peace*. Peter Bernstein plays the theme with such radiance and clearly articulated tones, that it is as if musical sunshine has suddenly broken through the clouds. The composition is not only replayed as a beautiful ballad; in a quiet, subtle way, the humanitarian statement also makes itself felt.

The pieces on this CD are always a bit more than “just” the brilliant interaction of three superb musicians. There is a lot of spirit floating around here—“wit” in the sense of a deep-grounded intelligence — sensual, exciting musicality that is subtle at the same time. There are also pieces like the curiously laconic *Mr. Meagles*, which, as Larry Goldings puts it, “is dedicated to a well-known actor’s dog that we recently ran into at the Village Vanguard. Dog and actor were both very gracious.” The enjoyment of this observation resonates through this last sentence — you also hear it in a piece that sounds like a tongue-in-cheek comment set in sound.

A passion for imagery, for the telling of stories through allusion permeate the pieces, making them work through the listeners’ own powers of association. The pieces carry such titles as *Useless Metaphor* and *Ramshackle Serenade*— titles that map out exciting journeys for the listener.

There are also lovely musical bows to some of the greats: an unusually powerful, soulful genuflection to drummer Max Roach, the hauntingly beautiful bow to composer Horace Silver and his aforementioned *Peace*, as well as a nod to bossa Nova poet-composer Antonio Carlos Jobim with the trio’s instrumental interpretation of Jobim’s musically and lyrically multilayered song *Luiza*. It is an interpretation that, like a delicate hidden stream, alludes to more intimate voices.

The many layers of beauty: the trio lays them out before you to discover and enjoy. And there is so much more, as that beauty and what lies behind it unobtrusively presents itself. These three musicians never make a big deal about what they are up to; they just go about generating an infectious energy by way of their extraordinarily subtle control of all the musical parts.