



STEVE DAVIS



RICK GERMANSON



DAVID WILLIAMS



JOE MAGNARELLI



NEIL SMITH

# charles DAVIS

How do we measure and respond to loss? Measurement is done by comparison to some standard and, if we choose to gauge the depth of loss and the resolute strength needed to stay alive in its wake by how Charles Davis has handled it, what better way than by listening to his truest voice, his music? As you may know, Charles's lovely wife, Lori Samet-Davis, passed away on April 8, 2012 after courageously battling a disease nevertheless bent to its grim task. As long-time friends of Charles and Lori, my own late wife, Jody Sandhaus, and I got to see first-hand the nature of their relationship — Lori, always nurturing and supportive, Charles always more dependent on that sweetness than he would have one think. But I have been on the road with him and seen how often he called Lori, so I know how it was. After all, I was usually after him in the line for the phone to make my own call home. It was a beautiful thing to see Charles do, an inspiring and calming model for this slightly younger musician.

I've gone back and listened to some of Charles' earlier recordings, to compare his playing then with the work on the present recital, an entirely warranted exercise since the title of the album states clearly that this is an "offering of sounds," given in honor of Lori. The easy conclusion? Charles Davis remains an unquestioned master. The shapes of his lines still seem more painted than played, as swaths of feeling whose analyzable elements can be revealed and parsed — if one must. Here though, the colors are so full of raw humanity that to sit appreciatively in the wash is, at least for me, the most rewarding, if vulnerable, posture. Every stroke is charged with the mission of remembrance, played by one who knows what's really at stake here, how each note could be one's last and how all of oneself must therefore infuse it.

When Producer Randy Knaffic offered me the honor of writing these notes I thought I knew what to expect, being a long time fan of Charles Davis. But, as I listened, for the first, tenth and twentieth times, I felt my hair stand on end and swore I could feel the air being moved. Listen to the at once plaintive and victorious wail Charles uses to get into his aria on "Begues,"



# for the love of Lori

the Putter Smith/composed, Michael Weiss/arranged opener. He leaves no room for doubt of intent here, or in his playing on every track.

But Lori's is not the only loss noted. Fans of this music know that the piano titan Cedar Walton, in Charles' words, "left town" last year. Slated to play on this recording, he was gone from here before he could do so but his indomitable way with music is very much present, notably in the rhythm section. We hear Cedar in the strong work of Rick Germanson, playing in Mr. Walton's stead, brilliantly balancing the dual roles of the pianist in a Jazz quintet, as supportive member of the rhythm section and as engaging soloist. Cedar's presence is also summoned by his first-call bassist and collaborator David Williams and in the excellence of Neal Smith's drumming, whose happy and open ride cymbal beat is redolent of the great Billy Higgins who, along with David Williams, comprised Mr. Walton's great trio, the group none of us on the NYC Jazz scene will ever forget.

Pianist Germanson gives us "Cedar's Blues" in tribute to that fallen giant, which tune features the always steady and melodic beat that has made David Williams an invaluable element in every band of which he has been a part, the bulwark on whom all can rely. Sometimes I think that with the many responsibilities of rhythmic connection with the

drummer, harmonic agreement with the pianist and provision of contrapuntal underpinning for the front line players, the bassist must be the best musician in the band. This recording does nothing to disabuse me of that notion. Having had the pleasure of playing with David and of listening to him over the years, I can say that, from the vantage points of inside and outside the band, he is all about taking care of business. And, he surely does that here.

Also gone but not forgotten, trumpeter Kenny Dorham is remembered on the Charles Davis tribute vehicle, "KD", the first solo going to Joe Magnarelli, whose strong, lyrical and, above all, searching ways seem to consistently reveal something fresh and somehow familiar, too. He's so in touch with the heart when he plays that he allows us to get in touch with our own — that's the job of the artist, really, which makes Joe a great one. You want to warm up your record or the bandstand? Get Joe Magnarelli.

"KD" and "Into the Himalayas" are kicked off by evocative drums intros, pulling our coats to Neal Smith's beautiful work throughout, his infectious time feel and always suggestive fills marking him as the first-tier player he is. I like the way he adjusts his playing to each new soloist and each change of mood suggested by the proceedings, sometimes suggesting those changes himself, always

in the most generous and subtle ways. On Charles' arrangement of "What'll I Do?", as elsewhere, trombonist Steve Davis' solo is a tour de force of compositional consideration. Beautiful notes, sure, but their inherent articulation gives tangible life to Steve's lines, the result being cogent statements, well-conceived and with clear direction. Neal Smith's brushwork here is a study in patient service to mood.

Having known the dear heart that was Lori Davis, I can only imagine how touched she would be by the unvarnished beauty of this recording's title track. Penned by Charles and introduced and supported warmly by Rick Germanson, the tune takes us on a wistful walk through grief and memory, from the pathways of which we can see that beauty — and love — never die.

So, it's safe to say that Charles Davis' response to deep loss, as I think it should be for all of us when our time inevitably comes, is to feel and acknowledge it, bravely find the beauty in it, wherever it may be, and to sing that beauty with a full throat. With this recording, Mr. Davis has courageously shown us his strong heart. How good a musician — and man.

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