

CHRIS GREENE QUARTET'S *BOUNDARY ISSUES* ATTEMPTS TO IGNORE BORDERS, FENCES AND PURITY

BY COREY HALL

IMMEDIATELY AFTER DISCOVERING electricity during a 1960s session at Chess Records, Muddy Waters flipped off the Chess brothers (on GP), and then began grooving with his new band...the Yellowjackets.

That's a damn lie!

True, but this musical matrimony actually happened in tenor saxophonist Chris Greene's mind, so he wrote a song based off this never-happened-hit, called it "Blues for Dr. Fear," brought it to his quartet, and recorded the occasion on *Boundary Issues*, the ensemble's new release.

The Chris Greene Quartet – which features pianist Damian Espinosa, bassist Marc Piane, and drummer Steve Corley – cut this side one week before performing at the 2016 Chicago Jazz Festival. ("We ended up getting a five-minute standing ovation," Greene recalled about the performance. "Our fans came out and completely acted a fool, which is what I was hoping they would do. It was a very good day.") The album pays tribute to those who have left lasting legacies, such as Eddie Harris, Horace Silver, and Kenny Kirkland, while also dipping into house music grooves and reggae.

"We're trying to be true to ourselves artistically, but we're always making sure a musical lifeline, be it melody or rhythm, is always being thrown to the audience," Greene said, during a recent conversation with the JazzGram. "If they can grab onto a groove we're playing, we can throw some crazy stuff on top and get away with it."

After Greene's house music-flavored "Here to Help," which he describes as attempting a "futuristic Eddie Harris-type vibe," the quartet interprets Horace Silver's "Nica's Dream" by giving it a '70s reggae feel.

"We're always trying to have an authentic approach to what this music means to us, so we apply the music of our era to jazz standards," said Piane. "We approach everything with deep respect for the tradition, while also playing the music that has a deep impact on us."

Boundary Issues actually begins with a sampled-sound piece entitled "Prologue: The Inner Conversation." For 61 seconds, quotes from various voices, from Nina Simone to Branford Marsalis to Prince, among others, are heard at random, as the listener's ears roam through a crowded room.



"There's good music, and then there's shit!" Marsalis is heard saying.

"Everybody wants to be a beast, until they have to do what beasts do," says Eric Thomas, a motivational speaker.

"We wanted to incorporate these statements of artistic endeavor into one, upfront experience," said Joe Tortorici, the album's producer. "There is even some maniacal laughter in there, which is a secret joke. But Chris said, 'Leave it in.' And it created an atmosphere for what followed."

When addressing Kirkland's "Dienda," which Greene first heard on Marsalis' *Royal Garden Blues*, the challenge centered on how to adapt this jazz waltz into the quartet's DNA.

"We pushed it into early '70s CTI Records-land," Greene explained. "We added a slight backbeat, electric bass, and pushed it as close to the 'Contemporary Jazz' line without tipping it over."

On "The Crossover Appeal," the album's showcase single, Greene is joined by tenor saxophonist Marqueal Jordan. (Other musicians making guest appearances are percussionist JoVia Armstrong, guitarist Isaiah Sharkey, and rapper Julian Davis.) This two-tenor approach,

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Greene noted, is mutual collaboration, not a macho cutting contest.

“There are times when Marqueal ended a line up here, and I would pick up from there,” Greene said.

“We’re throwing behind-the-back passes to each other to get to the basket and just having a great time.”

When the Chris Greene Quartet began 12 years ago, Piane noted, it had an acoustic focus. Then, an urge to

play funkier music with acoustic instruments followed, eventually leading to the ensemble’s current footprint.

“With the evolution of our sound, we are finding certain places where there may be more electric (piano and bass) to match the sound we’re going for,” he said.

“We’re always trying to push forward and evolve. That’s what has kept what we do fresh. This record, I hope, is a snapshot in our continued evolution.” ■