

Joshua Redman, saxophone

Saturday, September 21, 2002, 8 pm
Zellerbach Hall

Joshua Redman, saxophones
Sam Yahel, keyboards
Brian Blade, drums

Tonight's program will be announced from the stage
and does not include an intermission.

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Joshua Redman was born in Berkeley on February 1, 1969, the son of noted saxophonist Dewey Redman. His early music education was guided by his mother, Renee Shedroff, who enrolled him in Indonesian and Indian music classes when he was five. He took up the tenor saxophone at age 10 and showed great promise, but chose to concentrate on academic studies instead. Redman was accepted for early admission to Harvard University, from which he graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa in 1991. After being accepted to Yale Law School, his music finally came to the forefront of his life.

"New sound, old spirit" might be the best way to distill the impact of Redman's new Warner Brothers disc *Elastic*. After a decade as one of the jazz world's most prominent, profound saxophonists and bandleaders in an acoustic setting, Redman now adds new textures and tensions in what he calls the "electric, groove-based thing" of his brilliant new trio.

"This project is something I've thought about since I started playing music seriously, ever since I started touring and recording as a leader," Redman explains. "I always had the sense that someday, I would do a project with a broader sonic pallet. Something that did not just use acoustic instruments, something more groove-based."

These long-germinating ideas bear fruit in *Elastic*'s dozen tracks, forming a collection in which expanded compositional and production detail enhance the ensemble spontaneity at the unshakable core of Redman's conception. For Redman, *Elastic* presented an opportunity to take bolder steps as a composer. "Jazz often treats composition only as a starting point," he admits, "a springboard for improvisation that you quickly get out of the way. I wanted to take a larger compositional approach, to tell multi-part stories without sacrificing identity and freedom and openness. I wanted to make the improvisations part of the greater meaning of the songs, without feeling limited the way a sax player does when told to take eight bars and blow on an R&B session."

The challenge allowed Redman to call upon many of his greatest musical inspirations.

"Weather Report, of all the electric groups, was the ultimate in striking that balance between composition and improvisation," Redman explains, "although rhythmically this band probably comes more out of James Brown, Maceo Parker, and the Motown sound." Other sources cited by the saxophonist include Stevie Wonder, The Beatles, Prince, Earth Wind and Fire, Led Zeppelin, The Police, Aretha Franklin, Jimi Hendrix, and such contemporary artists as D'Angelo, Meshell Ndegeocello, Radiohead, and Bjork. "These sorts of influences have always been there," he notes, "but I suppose they might be a little more noticeable now, with this kind of project."

For several years, Redman has worked and recorded with exceptional acoustic quartets, including the unit with pianist Aaron Goldberg, bassist Reuben Rogers, and drummer Gregory Hutchinson heard on Redman's acclaimed previous album *Passage Of Time*. *Elastic* marks a stage of both consolidation and expansion in Redman's development. "Passage Of Time, even though I didn't realize it initially, was like a summing-up for me of everything I had worked on over the past 10 years," he reflects. "Once this became clear, I knew that it was time to take a step in a new direction. Some of these ideas had been in my head for years, but they had never fully developed because they didn't fit an ensemble with acoustic bass and piano. It was time to flesh out those ideas."

The process led Redman to discover a vibrant new ensemble voice for his music. After he experimented with larger configurations that included guitars and bass as well as keyboards, Redman found his ideal partners in Sam Yahel, whose prowess on both piano and organ made him a New York underground sensation in the late 1990s, and Brian Blade, a first-call drummer in both jazz and pop realms who made his initial impact as part of an earlier Redman band. As a unit, Redman, Yahel, and Blade have already turned heads on the recent collaborative effort *yaya3*, and they display equal brilliance in interpreting the saxophonist's new music.

"I'd been playing with Sam and Brian on and off at Small's [in New York] since 1997," Redman notes. "Sam initially invited me to play when [guitarist] Peter Bernstein couldn't make it one Wednesday, and there was an instant connection. After that, Sam would often call me when he knew I was in town and I'd come down whenever I could. Because these gigs were relaxed, informal, and unplanned, the trio has evolved more organically than any band I've ever played with. I started really looking forward to coming off the road and playing with Sam and Brian.

"Sam was always asking me to bring in material. I didn't think that I had anything that fit with an organ, until I realized that I could bring in some of these other ideas. They had worked in other contexts, but here they really clicked, because the instrumentation and the personalities fit the looseness and creativity of the music. With Sam and Brian there was no trade-off between grooving and improvising. We got the rhythmic vitality, the sonic range, and all the compositional elements, while at the same time feeling an even greater sense of openness and group interaction."

The brilliant efforts of the threesome are enhanced by an approach to studio production that Redman describes as "ninety percent live," one that keeps the spontaneity at the heart of all of Redman's music in clear focus. "Rather than rely on the studio to make the music work, we wanted to do things that were more subtle, to use new sounds and technologies as a means to the end of making the music more expressive. So we cut everything live, then stepped back and saw how the raw material inspired us. The few edits and overdubs we did were ultimately dictated by the live, spontaneous tracks. For example, the harmonized saxophone licks were built on improvised ideas that had a larger compositional flavor. It was essential to all of us that every sound we created had a natural basis as we entered the non-acoustic world. I didn't want the electric textures to leap out, but I didn't want the tricky harmonies and complex rhythms we used in spots to stick out, either. We had to feel intellectually and technically challenged, and still feel comfortable and natural with the music."

Elastic satisfies all of these demands that Redman feels compelled to answer as a creative musician, and marks a vibrant new chapter in his odyssey. "This is definitely the most challenging music I've created," he acknowledges. "There's still a lot of swing in it, especially the way Brian plays drums, but there are also moments, on 'Jazz Crimes' and 'Molten Soul,' for instance, when it feels like we're playing funk and swing at the same time. On other pieces, like 'Still Pushing That Rock' and 'News From the Front,'

I don't know what kind of beat you'd call that. There is a sense of fluidity and flexibility throughout all of this music. I've always believed, and the conviction only grows stronger as I grow musically, what's most important is how the music inspires us as a band. If we're inspired every night, we will play with the necessary soul and spirit. As a band, we feel this music inspires that kind of collective discovery—that sense of adventure—every night. In that way, it is no different from any other project I've done."

Elastic delivers the balance of eloquence and exploration that veteran Redman listeners have come to expect, in a setting and with an attitude that can only expand his circle of fans and reinforce Redman's place among the vanguard of contemporary artists.

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