



Jazz Promo Services

**Jack Mouse-Scott Robinson-Janice Borla
"Three Story Sandbox"
(Tall Grass TG 8283) Street Date: January 1, 2016
Jack Mouse-drums, Scott Robinson-reeds, Janice Borla-vocals**

The art and essence of Improvisation is far more than just creating variations on a theme. It is the core action of life itself, from the simplest concept of choosing another path when an obstacle arises, to the profound pursuits of existence at its most transcendent. For drummer Jack Mouse, multi-instrumentalist Scott Robinson and vocalist Janice Borla, Improvisation is the life force of their pursuit of brilliant artistry and the spinal cord of their message as eminent educators. Together they have created a stunning new album on Tall Grass Records, *Three Story Sandbox*.

Jack explains this most interesting title. "*Tall Grass Studios, where Janice and I live and record, is a three-story structure, each level having its own particular purpose/function and atmosphere, which contributed greatly to the overall vibe of the music. And Janice, Scott and I each have our own tales to tell. A Sandbox is a 'PlaySpace' – devoted to the unfettered creativity of child play... a state of mind that is intuitive, exploratory, creative, improvisatory....*"

The trio unabashedly uses the term Free Jazz to describe the music, despite that it often carries something of a misleading connotation. That term often implies music that is unstructured, chaotic, discordant, often inaccessible and even questionable as to the quality of musicianship involved. With *Three Story Sandbox*, all of those prejudices need to be tossed aside – as far as they can possibly be thrown. Despite the total spontaneity and absolute freedom involved in making this music, it is powerfully structured, totally cohesive, richly musical, vividly virtuosic, and absolutely enjoyable on every level.

As Jack further explains, "*Our goal is to create spontaneous, conversational, organized interplay of sounds – all fully informed by our musical histories and backgrounds in the rich jazz tradition.*" That interplay is on radiant display throughout this album. Spontaneous unison, stark contrasts, fleeting reflections, call and response, chase passages and every other exposition of creative energy constantly unfold in a kaleidoscopic array of aural imagery ranging emotionally from crystalline filigree to smoldering intensity. Many times throughout the album, there is a seamless connection between the three artists that blends into a synergistic core that makes it impossible to differentiate between them. One voice emerges from the mix to step into the forefront and quickly is absorbed back into the pond for the emergence of another. At times, the voicings created enter into soundscapes of nature, like flowing water, crackling fire and the music of non-human life, conveying a depth that is both primal and surreal.

The pursuit of musical expression at this level demands consummate artistry, but one that demands the musicians put aside their individual virtuosity on behalf of the aesthetic purposes. Clearly Jack, Scott and Janice

have done just that, while bringing the priceless element of shared musical experiences from their long history of interaction. A natural outgrowth of the 2015 Robinson/Mouse album – the highly acclaimed *Snakeheads & Ladybugs* – the addition of Janice was obvious. As Jack says, “*Janice isn’t just a singer, but a vocalist, and one of the few who has the musical knowledge, technical skills, the ability to comprehend abstract concepts, and who has always made it her personal artistic mission to be a unique voice, not just an echo.*” Jack’s total percussion mastery, embracing an approach that fully draws out the richest musical essence of each of the many instruments he plays here, combines with Scott’s impeccable abilities on a wide range of wind instruments and percussion, as well as acoustic guitar, assorted percussion and such esoterica as photo theremin and aktara.

While *Three Story Sandbox* has a total sense of continuity in the “suite-like” sensibility that is the essence of all great albums (as opposed to a collection of tracks), the 7-part *Sandbox Suite* and the following nine pieces are all uniquely crafted to convey a mood, ambience and compelling atmosphere that makes each item a story unto itself, while playing its own part in the telling of the overall tale.

On *Sandbox Suite*, Jack does not play traditional drum set, focusing entirely on various gongs and percussion instruments each specifically chosen for the particular nuance best suited to each piece. Scott’s horns are tenor sax and flutes, with the Navajo cedar flute featured in his evocative duet with Jack on the first movement, *The Summons*. Janice flows in on the second movement, *The Forge*, ushered in by Jack’s entrancing choked gongs and then Scott’s emotive tenor. *Conjurer* is highlighted by Jack’s Ojibway tortoise shell drum and Janice’s alluring vocal whisper. An African mood is set on *Across the Veld*, with Scott adding the stringed aktara and Janice her virtuoso vocal artistry. Jack’s vibrant gongs and Scott’s vigorous tenor combine for the aptly titled *Maelstrom*, leading into the radiant interplay between Janice and Scott on *Pas de Deux* enhanced by Jack’s sparkling colorations. The exhilarating *Blood Moon Rising* ends the suite on a dynamic note.

The remaining nine tracks, while not a suite, are so perfectly designed and sequenced that the flow is similarly inspired. Jack sticks to the drum set throughout, while Scott employs c-melody sax, e-flat clarinet and cornet. Each piece, reflecting the points of inspiration defined by the titles, expresses its own unique flavor and character, spanning a full emotional palette from exuberant joy to beguiling beauty. There is the playful *Slap Happy*, with Scott’s slap-tongue technique intertwining with Janice’s nimble vocal; *Brushfyre*, with Jack on brushes and Scott providing a full two minutes of circular breathing, and Jack and Janice calling to mind the Jon Hendricks/Max Roach duet on George Russell’s classic *New York, N.Y.* *Anghiari* displays Janice’s enormous vocal range in the portrait of the Umbrian village, while *Beam Me Up* is a sojourn into the outer reaches with Scott on photo-theremin, Jack’s stick trills and rubs and Janice’s “extra-terrestrial” vocalizing.

Imaginative duets abound with Jack and Scott marching in tango-style on *March to Castile*; Janice adding thigh slaps to her vocal and Scott’s robust cornet on *Snap and Twirl*; Middle-eastern modality of Scott’s clarinet and hand played drums on *Hand Blown*; and the sensual poignancy of Janice with Scott’s c-melody on *Circe’s Lament*. This extraordinary album closes with *Scott Free*, a splendid c-melody solo.

Empirical proof that Jack Mouse’s, Scott Robinson’s and Janice Borla’s commitment to the profound life-substance of Improvisation is in pursuit of the transcendent, *Three Story Sandbox* is a masterpiece.

For more information, visit www.jackmouse.com and www.janiceborla.com

National Publicity Campaign

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