
the dan cray TRIO

Primary Genre: Jazz
Secondary Genre: Acoustic
Contact Name: Dan Cray
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Instrumentation

Dan Cray, Piano
Clark Sommers, Acoustic Bass
Greg Wyser-Pratte, Drums

The Chicago-based Dan Cray Trio is a rarity in today's jazz world: a young band that uses a collaborative mentality to develop extensive arrangements with maturity well beyond their years. While never abandoning the tradition, they nevertheless have a keen eye to the future.

Artist Information

Biography

The Dan Cray Trio is unique in that it relies on a collaborative effort rather than the singular vision that is more typically found in a piano trio. This in turn has allowed the group to rise above the pick-up band mentality that has come to dominate the jazz landscape. Because each musician is equally invested in the development of the music, the Trio is able to match the intensity and clarity of purpose that define the best jazz artists. Their innovative arrangements and group dynamic have led Cadence Magazine to rate them "as interesting, if not more, than the celebrated Bad Plus." The Trio's music has been featured in the hit television show "Gossip Girl," and they were personally selected by director Michael Keaton for his film "The Merry Gentleman." In Chicago, they were featured on the hit radio program Eight Forty-Eight with host Steve Edwards on Chicago's NPR station WBEZ. They've performed at the Chicago and Idlewild Jazz Festivals as well as venues around the country to critical acclaim, and can

be seen regularly around Chicago with the city's top vocalists and instrumentalists. The Trio has also been able to transfer this focus into tangible success, as their last two studio CDs ("No One" and "Save Us") spent over 10 weeks on the National and College Jazz Charts, while Chicago's NPR station WBEZ named each among the year's best in 2003 and 2005 respectively.

Dan Cray

Pianist Dan Cray is one of the most dynamic young jazz artists working today. Jazz Radio Berlin has hailed him as a "key figure when it comes to escorting jazz into the new millennium," while the Indianapolis Star enthused that his playing had "both the depth and the playfulness characteristic of jazz piano at its best." Dan was a finalist for both the 2004 American Pianists Association Cole Porter Fellowship and the 2003 Montreux Jazz Festival Solo Piano Competition, and has performed around the world with his group and others.

For the past 10 years, Dan has led a group with good friends bassist Clark Sommers and drummer Greg Wyser-Pratte. Together they've released four CDs as the Dan Cray Trio: *Who Cares* (2001), *No One* (Blujazz 2003), *Save Us* (Blujazz 2005), and *Over Here Over Heard* (Crawdada 2008). Dan has also been privileged to work with a number of other established jazz musicians and ensembles, including Eddie Johnson, Bobby Broom, Ira Sullivan, Orbert Davis, Eric Schneider, George Fludas, Kurt Elling, Ari Brown and the Chicago Jazz Orchestra. He also works frequently in a duo context with saxophonist Geof Bradfield.

Dan graduated with bachelor degrees in Jazz Studies and European History from Northwestern University, where he studied with Donald Isaak and Michael Kocour.

Clark Sommers

Based in New York via Chicago, Clark is a highly in demand bassist who has toured and performed extensively throughout the world. He has performed with Cedar Walton, Kevin Mahogany, Kurt Elling, Ira Sullivan, Frank Wess, Charles McPherson, Von Freeman, Lin Haliday, Maurice Brown, Bobby Broom, Jeff Parker, Ron Perrillo, Jodie Christian, Michael Weiss, George Fludas, Dana Hall, Kimberly Gordon, Ted Sirota's Rebel Souls, and The Chicago Jazz Orchestra. For two years, Clark performed and toured with Sony Recording Artists "The Mighty Blue Kings." Clark was the bassist on their critically acclaimed album "Live from Chicago," and received significant local and national media exposure. During his stint with MBK, he also performed at international jazz festivals in the US, Ireland, France and Canada, sharing bills with Tony Bennett, Diana Krall, B.B. King, Dr. John, The Staples Singers, Koko Taylor and Buddy Guy. In Singapore, Hong Kong, and Korea he was featured with the Eden Atwood Quartet. Clark completed his undergraduate degree in Jazz Studies at California Institute of the Arts, where he studied with bass masters Charlie Haden and Darek Oles.

Greg Wyser-Pratte

Drummer Greg Wyser-Pratte has enjoyed a wide variety of musical experiences despite his relatively late start with percussion instruments. Coming from a musical family, Greg was encouraged to explore his interest in the creative arts. He started on piano and played trumpet for nine years before discovering his love for jazz drumming at age 18. Greg enrolled at Northwestern University, where he received a well-rounded musical education and had the opportunity to perform with jazz masters including Ron Blake, Ray Brown, Max Roach, Rufus Reid, and Danilo Perez. He graduated in 1998 with a Bachelor of Music in Jazz Studies.

Since then, Greg has worked as a freelance drummer with an ever-expanding list of jazz greats at the area's major clubs. He has shared the stage with luminaries Ira Sullivan, John Campbell, Jodie Christian, Ron Perrillo, Judy Roberts, Bobby Broom, Kimberly Gordon, Hinda Hoffman and The Chicago Jazz Orchestra to name just a few. In addition to his freelance work, Greg can claim membership in several successful groups including the Dan Cray Trio, the Jerry Devivo Band, and the Nia Quintet, Greg has made many recordings with these and other groups. Greg's drumming skills have also taken him out of native Chicago on occasion. He toured the United States with the swing band Three Cent Stomp. He has also toured England, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Spain with pop-country band Utah Carol. While back at home, Greg also maintains an active teaching schedule so that he may pass on these great experiences to others.

Discography

The Dan Cray Trio: "Who Cares" (2001)

The Dan Cray Trio: "No One" (2003)

Marc Courtney Johnson: "Marc Johnson and the Dan Cray Trio" (2004)

John Goldman: "In Walked Pierre" (2005)

The Dan Cray Trio: "Save Us" (2005)

Erin McDougald: "Meeting Place" (2006)

The Dan Cray Trio: "Over Here Over Heard" (2008)

Links

<http://www.dancray.com>

Press Reviews

"A lot of intriguing ideas. . .most as interesting, if not more, than the celebrated Bad Plus."

Cadence Magazine

Album Review of "No One"

The pianist I hear most as an influence on No One is Ahmad Jamal. His distinctive method of breaking up time is very prominent on this CD. The propulsive,

clipped time of the bass and drums make a good platform for Dan Cray's busy soloing. A touch of "Sketches Of Spain" haunts the Midwestern reflections of the lovely "Time Window," while "Avalon" is built on an unexpectedly soulful and urgent bass line from Clark Sommers and a creeping tension that continually builds pressure in the piece.

The two Monk tunes are rethought in interesting ways. "Epistrophy" is powered by tumbling drums and a repetitive piano counter-melody on the chords, while "In Walked Bud" is where the Jamal influence is most evident. Cray chops the melody into bits then rumbles along in a clipped, percussive fashion with Sommers and Wyser-Pratt adding heft to the sound. This group has a lot of intriguing ideas to spruce up the familiar piano trio format, most as interesting, if not more, than the celebrated Bad Plus. This is an excellent CD that is well worth seeking out.

"A bold creative assault on known material. . ."
Jazz Times

"Save Us" Album Review by Thomas Conrad

Dan Cray has been compared to Ahmad Jamal. Cray does not have Jamal's touch or sense of musical space, but he shares Jamal's deep concern with group form. What is most interesting about Cray is not his considerable chops--there are piano chops around to burn these days--but his sophistication as a conceptualist. Like Jamal, he thinks about the piano trio orchestrally. Each of the 10 tracks on Save Us! is a complete design, and improvisation flows directly from the plan.

Most often that plan is a bold, creative assault on known material that transforms every structural element and leaves just enough of the song's skeleton in sight for recognition. Cray is also interested in the organic relationship between jazz past and jazz present. He strongly represents the latter, but chooses material with a rich history. His abstractions of "Without a Song" and "Just One of

Those Things" and "When You Wish Upon a Star" are fearlessly liberated yet reveal their own inner logic.

The performance that permanently makes the case for Dan Cray is "If You Could See Me Now." This Tadd Dameron song needs no improvement, but Cray's painfully slow search through its possible connotations, returning to its ascending melodic affirmation over and over, never quite separating from it, understanding it anew, is a very good reason to buy this album.

"Like a poet or a painter who searches constantly for new ways to express himself without losing his core focus. . ."

All About Jazz

"Save Us" Album Review by Jim Santella

Jazz's modern mainstream has to preserve tradition while exploring unique approaches. It's got to grow. A lot of folks translate the concept of uniqueness into something "far out" and "hip" and "never before attempted." But stretching the boundaries of jazz to its limits has drawbacks. Some push too far and become alienated. Some water down the jazz with outside sources that prove discomfiting. Many of today's innovators simply sell out. If they turn away from the core music that brought us here, then they've failed.

Dan Cray preserves the straightahead tradition with his Chicago-based piano trio, yet he finds new ways to interpret it. Like a poet or a painter who searches constantly for new ways to express himself without losing his core focus, the pianist has succeeded in recreating Cole Porter, Thelonious Monk, Wayne Shorter, and Horace Silver with aplomb. They're the same old songs, but they're interpreted with a fresh, new outlook.

The trio's version of "Just One of Those Things" makes a dramatic impact. Cray moves the familiar theme in suite-like fashion through different scenes

that reflect changing moods. Together, the threesome forges ahead with widely different approaches for one theme. The pianist's dynamic strides give the piece new life.

After establishing the tune of a standard piece, Cray likes to jazz it up. Isn't that what it's all about? He takes each piece on a whirlwind ride, alters its texture to the foundation, and reinterprets it with authority. Meters change, moods fly back and forth, and the scene varies. His fresh approach comes loaded with a fiery, percussive piano attack one moment and a suave, comforting layer of harmony the next. Cray's "Good Morning" and "Good Bye" evoke misty moonlit impressions with introspective leanings that evolve into a confident strut along with powerful reflections.

"Trinkle Tinkle" comes loaded with a refreshing new texture as the trio drives it with raw power. "Night Dreamer" appears before us with an exotic façade that remains personal and up close. "Summer in Central Park" finds the trio floating along on its laissez-faire theme with added sparks entering the scene to fire this way and that. Cray builds each of his selections from the ground up, transforming them from the usual to the unique without ever losing sight of tradition. Highly recommended.

Setlist

Tunes from the albums and recent additions!

Basic Requirements

See accompanying backline requirements and stage plot.
