

BI GRAPHY

TIM RIES THE ROLLING STONES PROJECT

Jazz albums are born in a number of different ways. Some arrive with birth pangs after a trial-and-error search for just the right notes and perfect deliverance. Some burst out in a sudden and explosive improvisational brilliance with unblemished first takes. Then, there are those discs that come to fruition in their own time-frame, steeping in years of work that ultimately fulfills the creative vision of the artist. Saxophonist Tim Ries' new CD and his debut for Concord Jazz, *The Rolling Stones Project*, fits squarely into the latter category—a sprawling tour schedule with the Stones, and the logistics of putting together such an ambitious project the main culprits here. Without a doubt, it's been worth the wait. This 11-song collection not only celebrates the iconic pop band but also illustrates how ripe the group's songs are for jazz renderings.

The CD features Ries breathing jazz life into the rock tunes. It also spotlights several guests who bring their support to the project. Included in the mix are vocalists **Sheryl Crow**, **Lisa Fischer**, **Norah Jones**, and **Luciana Souza**; jazz guitar icons **Bill Frisell** and **John Scofield**; keyboardist **Larry Goldings**; and Wayne Shorter's brilliant bass-drum team **Brian Blade** and **John Patitucci**. Most unexpectedly, the Project even features Rolling Stones members **Keith Richards**, **Charlie Watts** and **Ron Wood**, who also contributed the album cover art. Sessions were recorded in New York, Los Angeles and Munich, Germany.

The journey of the album began in 1999 when Ries was enlisted to join the Rolling Stones on their "No Security" tour (which he describes as, "the gig of a lifetime"), playing in the horn section as well as contributing keyboard colors to the rockers' repertoire. After the tour concluded, Ries went into the studio to record his second album, *Alternate Side* on European jazz indie Criss Cross Records, and decided to include a jazz arrangement of the Stones' song "Moonlight Mile." In the liner notes to *The Rolling Stones Project*, Ries writes: "The song had a loose jazz feel, and it seemed to work quite well as an instrumental. In recording this song, it occurred to me that the music of the Stones held great potential for jazz arrangements."

The success of this song as a vehicle for jazz got Ries thinking about doing the same with other well-known, as well as more obscure, Stones tunes. At the time, the band was on a two-year hiatus from the road before their next worldwide tour, "Forty Licks," so the saxophonist used the down-time to start working on his new album, an ambitious package of Mick Jagger / Keith Richards gems. "I arranged three songs to see if they would work," explains Ries, who set out to explore "Paint It Black," "Gimme Shelter" and "As Tears Go By." "I thought these tunes could serve as a demo, so I brought together Bill Charlap on piano, Ben Monder on guitar, John Patitucci on bass and Brian Blade on drums. We recorded them in one take." ("As Tears Go By" will be added as a bonus track on the Japanese version of the CD).

Ries then sought the Stones' blessing on the project. During the rehearsal period for the "Forty Licks" tour Tim gave the three-song demo to Jagger, Richards, Watts and Wood. In a *DownBeat* magazine interview, Richards said, after hearing the demos, "I thought what Tim recorded was amazing, and I'm sort of jealous of him. When we wrote those songs, there was a lot of pressure on us to keep them as short as possible for the singles market. With what Tim does, he has the luxury to stretch out the melodies and play with the different chords and harmonies. Instead of the sketches that we basically recorded, Tim's versions are more like fully finished things. The playing is beautiful too—Tim always has such a beautiful sound."

Back on the road, with his iPod packed with Stones songs, Ries began studying which other tunes would work in a jazz setting. One case in point: "Street Fighting Man," which he re-envisioned with a Brazilian groove. "That's one of the songs I don't play on in concert with the Stones, so I was sitting backstage listening and I

Concord Records
100 North Crescent Drive, Suite 275
Beverly Hills, CA 90210
T: (310) 385-4111 F: (310) 385-4466
www.concordrecords.com

heard a pandeiros percussion rhythm. That's how it became Brazilian, with an authentic Baiao feel. I changed the key, added harmonies and then went into the studio with [Brazilian-American vocalist] Luciana Souza and percussionist Mauro Refosco among the musicians, and they helped put a great spin on it." Ries hastens to note that he wanted to keep the melodies in tact on his jazz transformations: "It was OK to change the keys, time signatures and tempos, but I wanted to leave the melodies untouched."

Another case in point: the opening track "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," which is recast as a straight-up instrumental jazz groove inspired by both Lee Morgan's hit instrumental "Sidewinder" and the Eddie Harris/Les McCann beauty "Compared to What." "I played around with a lot of harmonies and a boogaloo beat," Ries says. "Sco [Scofield] was in town, so he's in there with a great guitar solo. You can imagine this tune being a played in a small West Village club on Bleeker Street by a band really hitting it."

During a break in the "Forty Licks" tour, the band was in L.A., which gave Ries time to record more music. He asked Watts, who has many jazz recordings under his own name, if he'd like to take part in the sessions. He said yes, and much to Ries' amazement Richards and Wood came along with him. Sheryl Crow, who Tim has performed with in the past, also showed up at the studio adding her distinctive touch to the mix. "I was speechless," Ries says. "These sessions could never be duplicated." The group recorded "Honky Tonk Woman," featuring Richards rocking on guitar and Watts on drums, and "Slippin' Away" with the three Stones playing and Crow vocalizing. After most of the band left, Ries and Watts, with Goldings on organ, revisited "Honky Tonk Woman" with a swingin' Hammond B3 groove. (Both takes are included on *The Rolling Stones Project*).

Early in the project, Ries thought Bill Frisell and Norah Jones would be a perfect match on this material. But because of conflicting schedules, it appeared that the album would be completed without either. Luckily, Frisell happened to have a day off in Germany while the Stones were playing in Munich, so Ries made the connection with the guitarist. "It was especially cool because I got Bill into the Stones show, which was a first for him," he says. "Bill was in heaven, at the show and hanging out backstage."

In a small studio in Munich, Frisell joined in with Ries and Watts on "Waiting on a Friend" (the Stones' recorded version featured on saxophone one of Ries' heroes, Sonny Rollins), and "Belleli," a quiet Ries-original dedicated to his twin daughters who were born while he was touring. Frisell also played on "Ruby Tuesday," rendered here as a sublime duet with Ries. Remarkably at the 11th hour, Jones came home from one of her extended tours and agreed to record "Wild Horses." "That was the final recording for the album," says the saxophonist. "Bill was so busy, but I flew him in to New York from Toronto, and we did it in one take." That soulful number is now one of the many highlights on the CD.

Rolling Stone Ron Wood's fascinating cover art is a work that has graced the wall in his mother's living room since he painted it in the late 1960s. When Ronnie offered up this piece, Ries was ecstatic since the distinctive artwork was created in the same time period as many of the Jagger/Richards songs included on the disc. The imagery of the horses seemed to directly reference the classic tune performed by Norah Jones.

"I was shocked that this album came together the way it did," says Ries. "To get all these performers and to put a jazz touch on the Stones' songs, well, I've got to say that this project was a miracle."

For more information on Tim Ries, log on to www.timries.com

Don Lucoff / Brad Riesau
DL Media
T: (610) 667-0501 / T: (909) 585-5200
E: dondlmedia@covad.net / braddlmedia@covad.net

Jo Foster
Concord Records
T: (310) 385-4218
E: jof@concordrecords.com

Concord Records
100 North Crescent Drive, Suite 275
Beverly Hills, CA 90210
T: (310) 385-4111 F: (310) 385-4466
www.concordrecords.com