



Liner Notes - Penumbra

In this day and age of homogenization, compartmentalization, and relentless labeling of the musical arts, those among us who need the comfort of a “genre” or a “style” in order to say something like, “Oh, he’s a bebopper,” or “an avant-garde player,” can be easily confounded. Some of the best and most forward thinking of today’s young musicians clearly find ways to avoid being locked into a stylistic corner by self-proclaimed mavens of jazz and improvised music. Here on the left coast for example, guitarist Nels Cline in a single performance, can pay beautiful mellifluous homage to Jim Hall one minute, venture into the outer realms of Derek Bailey the next, and conclude with a searing, Hendrix-styled inspired burner (check out his wonderfully eclectic work on Cryptogramphone to see what I mean).

Such eclecticism has to come from somewhere. Two of the major breeding grounds for this kind of imaginative diversity were and are, of course, the many musical odysseys of Miles Davis and John Coltrane. Both were restless seekers, never satisfied with the status quo, always reaching beyond themselves for new and uncharted improvisational geographies. Both men, each in his own way, sounded a clarion call for musicians and listeners alike to wake up, shake off their complacency and, as J. Krishnamurti would have said, free themselves from the known. It’s safe to say that among those who were first to hear the call was woodwind virtuoso and master improviser, Bennie Maupin.

To be a seeker in any art is a full-time thing. As a creative musician, one never stops listening, testing the waters, pushing the envelope, expanding the language. **Bennie Maupin** exemplifies the best of such things, and has embodied the spirits of both Miles and Coltrane as he forges his own unique sonic path and musical vision. His friendships and tutelage with Yusef Lateef, Sonny Rollins, and ‘Trane helped shape his musical personality; and the amazing breadth of his experience is reason enough to immerse yourself in his musical offerings. Bennie has played and recorded with a wide variety of musical icons, including trumpeters Davis, Lee Morgan, Freddie Hubbard; pianists McCoy Tyner, Herbie Hancock, Andrew Hill; saxophonists Lateef and Marion Brown; and drummers Roy Haynes, Jack DeJohnette, and Lenny White – to name only a few. He has played in all manner of musical settings and configurations, from solo performances to large orchestra concerts; from chamber recitals to Broadway shows. There is simply nothing the man can’t do and do brilliantly.

Early on in the metamorphosis of the Ensemble, Bennie began exploring the trio format, and we were aided by some great bassists; however, once **Darek Oles** entered the picture, Bennie was certain that his was the voice that would enable the compositions and improvisations to breathe in a way that would illuminate the music and take it to another level. Darek is the core of so much of what we do. His dark, beautifully resonant sound moves around and through the musical tapestry, warping and woofing, creating lovely and always intriguing harmonic and rhythmic counterpoint. Malleable and intensely

creative, Darek is a joy to make music with, and brings so much beauty to Bennie's vision. As if there were no end to his gifts, Darek is a gifted composer as well, as evidenced by his debut disc for Cryptogramophone, *Like a Dream*.

Munyungo Jackson is a wonder, a wizard of sound and feeling, a virtuoso percussionist, and an empathetic, endlessly inventive musician. His deep and abiding musical and personal relationship with Bennie spans at least thirty years, and he has been a member of virtually every one of Bennie's groups since the mid-70's. Munyungo is an affable, worldly man whose persona and music are so irrepressible that he could play the air and make meaningful music. Everything has musical potential to him, from the conventional families of percussion instruments to thunder sheets and water glasses, to *vox humana*. Whatever sound source or rhythm Munyungo chooses to play, is realized in the most musical way. His improvisational sensitivity and lyricism make him one of the most sought after percussionists playing today.

To bear witness to Bennie's remarkable musicality as a listener is a wondrous thing. To be an intimate part of its creation and flowering is a gift and a blessing. I have been playing with Bennie for almost a decade, and the journey has been challenging, inspiring, and deeply rewarding. Bennie's music and his approach to group playing have allowed me to expand my own musical lexicon, and it has afforded me the opportunity to better understand the notion of interconnectivity, both in music and in life. To play the drums in Bennie's ensemble is to transcend playing the drums. One leaves one's ego at the door, so to speak, and becomes a musical *presence*, focusing inward and outward simultaneously, always in a state of *becoming*.

The Ensemble continues at this writing to grow and thrive. We play concerts in museums, churches, galleries, and universities, and we conduct master classes. We even play for elementary school children, giving them their first real exposure to improvised music. Yet, no matter where we play or who we play for, we invariably go where the muse leads us at that moment. And each time we play, we breathe together, as though we were one body. Thanks to a common aesthetic, mutual trust, and like-mindedness, the Ensemble has evolved to the point that we no longer play the music; *the music plays us*. It has been a truly remarkable experience. And like Miles did with his great bands, Bennie is the metaphysical glue that holds us all together. His clear vision shines brightly as we traverse these musical landscapes. For us, this organic music is a four-way conversation among old, dear friends. What could be better than that?

-- Michael Stephans

Bennie Maupin – bass clarinet, tenor & soprano saxophones, alto flute, piano
Darek “Oles” Oleszkiewicz – bass
Michael Stephans – drums
Daryl Munyungo Jackson – percussion

Track Listing

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| 1. Neophilia 2006 | 4:31 |
| 2. Walter Bishop Jr. | 6:32 |
| 3. Level Three | 3:15 |
| 4. Blinkers | 1:20 |
| 5. Penumbra | 7:01 |
| 6. Mirror Image | 1:14 |
| 7. Message to Prez | 6:02 |
| 8. Tapping Things | 5:35 |
| 9. Vapors | 4:44 |
| 10. One for Eric Dolphy | 2:33 |
| 11. See The Positive | 2:48 |
| 12. Trope on a Rope | 3:48 |
| 13. The 12 th Day | 2:52 |
| 14. Equal Justice | 7:15 |

Total: 60:30

Album Credits

All music by Bennie Maupin (Benpin Music BMI)
except “Penumbra” by B. Maupin (Benpin Music BMI)
D. Oleszkiewicz (L.A. Jazz Quartet Music BMI) M. Stephans (Endemic Music BMI)
& D.M. Jackson (Djembe Music BMI).
Produced by Bennie Maupin
Executive Producers: Bennie Maupin & Jeff Gauthier
Recorded by Nolan Shaheed, June 16,17 2003, at No Sound Studios, Pasadena,CA
Except for “Equal Justice” – recorded by Wayne Peet, December 11, 2006, at Crypto
Studios, Los Angeles, CA, and mixed by Rich Breen
Mastered by Rich Breen
Graphic Design by Alex Cline and Gareth Jiffeau
Cover Art – “Penumbra” © 2006 by Martha Castillo (www.marthacastillo.com)
Black and white photograph by Barbara DuMetz
Color photograph by Dietmar Halbauer