

MIKE STERN ADDS STING TO YELLOWJACKETS' *LIFECYCLE*

First Yellowjackets Recording in 15 Years to Feature a Guitarist Set For Worldwide Release On May 20, 2008

According to some basic, undeniable laws of nature, when two powerful forces collide, something explosive will occur, and a dramatic transformation is likely to take place as a result. It's a law that applies to every dynamic in the known universe, including jazz.

It stands to reason, then, that when a formidable jazz quartet like the Yellowjackets convenes in the studio with a high-energy guitar virtuoso like Mike Stern, the resulting reaction will be a singular event – one that's likely to create something entirely new on the jazz landscape.

This phenomenon is captured on *Lifecycle* (HUCD 3141), the new collaborative recording by the Jackets and Stern set for worldwide release on Heads Up International a division of Concord Music Group on May 20, 2008. The first Yellowjackets recording in 15 years to feature a guitar player, *Lifecycle* illustrates the kind of energy and creative brilliance that results when five talented players pool their individual talents as songwriters and musicians and merge into an entity that's far greater than the sum of its parts.

After simmering for years, the idea for the project reached critical mass when Stern and the Jackets performed together at the Montreal Jazz Festival in the summer of 2007. "We've all been a fan of Mike's for a long time," says Yellowjackets keyboardist and charter member Russell Ferrante. "Our goal was to make a recording that sounded like Mike had been in the band forever, and I think we accomplished that. To my ears, it feels cohesive – like five musicians with a genuine rapport."

From the Montreal dates in the heat of the summer to the studio sessions in rural New York State in January 2008, Stern felt the same sense of rapport. "The Yellowjackets are a great band," he says. "I think we have a lot in common musically, and our playing together felt very natural right away. They're the ideal collaborative team. It's so easy to play with them because they play so well together."

Lifecycle is, in some respects, two albums in one. Seven of the ten tracks are quintet pieces featuring Stern and the Jackets, while the remaining three are quartet pieces that showcase the individual and collective talents of the current Yellowjackets lineup: Ferrante, saxophonist Bob Mintzer, bassist Jimmy Haslip and drummer Marcus Baylor.

Whatever the combinations and permutations, it's all good. Mintzer contributes three tracks: the energetic opener, "Falken's Maze," the rhythmically complex "Yahoo," and the easygoing "I Wonder."

Stern's soloing on all three of these tracks is tastefully executed and in perfect sync with Mintzer's ambitious sensibilities. "Rhythmically, these songs were a challenge for me," says Stern, "but I'm always up for a challenge. I don't usually play in odd time signatures, but the rest of the guys made

even the challenging situations comfortable, and I was able to lay down some good solos for Bob's compositions."

"Mike is such a great musician," says Mintzer. "I wrote these songs as a way to showcase what he can do, and once he got a hold of them, he took them to a whole new place. There's a certain flexibility that you need to have when you write for a band like this. You have to be ready for things to take a different direction. That's definitely what has happened here, and it's fantastic."

More than just a highly skilled and versatile soloist, though, Stern contributes two songs to the mix – the syncopated and playful "Double Nickel," followed immediately by the more somber "Dreams Go."

Ferrante contributes the introspective "Measure of a Man" and the gently melodic "Claire's Closet," both written for the quartet without guitar. "I think the quartet pieces offer a contrast to the more high-octane pieces that feature the guitar," says Ferrante. "I was especially happy with 'Claire's Closet.' Bob's clarinet adds a very evocative quality to that song."

Haslip's contributions include the vaguely funky "Country Living," along with "Lazaro," an atmospheric piece that he co-wrote with Mintzer. "I had actually started writing 'Lazaro' for a solo record, but in the end, the piece had kind of a Jackets vibe to it," Haslip explains. "I thought it would be interesting to finish it with Bob's help, and he came up with some great stuff. I think that piece is a really fine collaboration."

Holding down the diversity of songwriting, the unusual time signatures and the subtle rhythmic shadings is Baylor, the relative newcomer who marks his seventh year as the Jackets' drummer. "As the drummer, you have to be able to colorize the tunes," he says. "There are a lot of textures that go into playing with a band like this. There are a lot of subtle points in any given composition. Playing the drums in a band like this is almost like putting accents on a painting."

But the release of *Lifecycle* in May is just the beginning of a picture that will continue to evolve throughout most of 2008. With the success of last year's Montreal Jazz Festival gigs, and armed with a new album that captures that onstage magic, Stern and the Yellowjackets will hit the road together later in the year for a series of U.S. and European tour dates in support of the album.

"I can't wait to play some of this music in concert with Mike," says Haslip. "He's a great artist with so much enthusiasm, and we're honored to have had the chance to make a record like this with him. For a good part of this year, the Yellowjackets will be a quintet, and we're very much looking forward to every minute of that experience."