

Since 2010, the gifted New York-based pianist Roberta Piket has recorded twice with various-sized ensembles -- *Sides*, *Colors* and *One for Marian* (Thirteenth Note TNR003 and TNR009) – and twice more unaccompanied – *Solo* and *Emanation* (Thirteenth Note TNR004 and TNR007). But it's been over a decade since she's recorded in the venerable piano trio format, the format in which her mastery is most evident. And a 2017 California tour provided the opportunity.

“I had played briefly with Joe La Barbera a couple of times,” Roberta explains, “when I did some master classes at the California Institute of the Arts. Bill Evans’ *Paris Concert* [with Marc Johnson and Joe La Barbera] has long been one of my all-time favorite recordings, so I always wanted to play with Joe.”

For these sessions Joe recommended bassist Darek Oleszkiewicz, who also had accompanied Roberta at Cal Arts. She sent them the music for the sessions, and when she arrived in Los Angeles to rehearse, these meticulous artists were prepped and ready to record. “It was one of the most effortless rehearsals I’ve ever done, because they were already playing the music great. So it was very easy for me to fall in with them.”

The set opens with a brand-new original by Roberta, **Mentor**, an unintended homage to her friend and former teacher, Richie Beirach. “After I wrote it,” she recalls, “I realized it sounded influenced by Richie.” Opening with a Beirachian pedal laid down by Joe and Darek, the percussive melody eases into a straight-ahead groove as Roberta solos fluently over the challenging chromatic harmony. A series of trades highlighting Joe’s kinetic precision lead back to the head, and then a return to that pedal point.

Richard Rodgers may have composed more waltzes than any other popular songwriter, waltzes that jazz artists have loved to swing – to Rodgers’ great displeasure – in 4/4. (Think Peggy Lee’s classic recasting of “Lover.”) But Roberta and the trio treat **Falling in Love with Love** as its creator intended, swinging it, of course, and brightly, but in its original 3/4 meter. Their playing is open and loose, always intuitive and always as one, as Roberta metrically modulates through the chord changes.

Roberta’s next original had a truly serendipitous birth. “This tune started as the bridge to ‘Mentor.’ I was workshopping that tune with [bassist] Harvie S and [drummer] Billy Mintz” – her frequent East Coast rhythm section mates – “and they both pointed out that the tune was better without a bridge. So I turned that segment into another tune and appropriately called it **A Bridge to Nowhere**.” For this track she asked guitarist Larry Koonse to join the trio. “In my mind, I could hear Larry’s beautiful sound blending with

the piano on this tune. His solo here is stunning – his melodic ideas and the way he builds. He’s also a great listener.” The exquisite improvised counterpoint that Larry and Roberta engage in toward the end of the track is proof of that.

“Unintentionally, for this recording I chose a few tunes that happen to have been written by some of my favorite pianists,” Roberta observes. And one of those favorites is Chick Corea, composer of **Humpty Dumpty**. The tempo is relentless but the trio is tight, with Joe effortlessly and creatively navigating the complicated rhythmic hits on the melody. Roberta’s solo overflows with imagination, and her two-handed runs, starting about halfway into the track, are exhilarating. “I first heard that tune as a teenager and I’ve been trying to play it ever since. It’s a challenging tune harmonically and rhythmically,” she adds. And in this brisk and bracing performance she more than meets that challenge.

Composed by Brazilian singer-songwriter Djavan, **Flor de Lis** is a bright, typically upbeat samba, and a tasty change of pace. Darek and Joe groove gently from beginning to end, as Roberta’s solo gradually builds in joyous intensity, until, having reached its peak, it finds a serene resolution. Additional percussion – congas, shaker, and triangle – are provided by Billy Mintz.

**Yemenja** (pronounced, “YEH-men-yah”) is a delicate, graceful melody in 3/4 by another gifted pianist, the late John Hicks. “John was a friend of mine,” Roberta says. “He was a beautiful human being, and very supportive of me when I was a young pianist. This is a lovely composition in both major and minor keys that reflects his great spirit. Darek’s solo is stunningly melodic and his sound is remarkable.” Roberta’s solo follows, with a light touch and sensitive approach that is most appropriate to the song. And don’t miss Joe’s colorful cymbal work, a highlight not only of this track, but of the entire disc.

With its 1922 vintage, **My Buddy** is, by far, the oldest song in the set and might seem an unusual choice for a jazz treatment. “I heard a very old version,” Roberta remembers. “I think it was one of the first recordings of that song, by the singer Henry Burr, who was famous in the early 1920’s. He sang it in the very stylized way men sang popular songs back then, similar to an operatic contra tenor. But even through that I was moved by the bittersweet quality of the song.” Darek’s solo bass turn halfway through brings out the poignancy of the simple, sweet melody.

For **Conception**, Larry Koonse rejoins the group, doubling the melody with Roberta, his guitar lines blending with her block chords to lend a rich, fresh sonority to George Shearing’s intricate forty-four bar head. Roberta and Larry deftly navigate through the tune’s complex harmony while Darek and Joe support them with solid swing.

It's hard to believe that the prolific Michel Legrand gifted us with the compelling and timeless melody of **The Windmills of Your Mind** a full half-century ago. "It's a very typical Legrand tune," Roberta points out. "He likes to use patterns that repeat in slightly different contexts to impel the melody forward. That's a hallmark of his writing." A naturally dramatic tune, usually performed as a ballad, Roberta arranged an up-tempo treatment in 7/4 that heightens its inherent emotion. "Check out Joe's fiery, inventive solo at the end," she adds.

Never having performed with her "West Coast trio" before making this recording, Roberta is justifiably proud of the outcome, and rightly enthralled by the contributions of her colleagues. Roberta comments, "Darek's time feel is beautiful and his solos are extraordinarily melodic and thoughtful. Joe's energy and creativity are boundless, and his instincts are impeccable. He brings out the best playing in everyone. And having Larry join us was the icing on the cake."

And of course, Roberta's own compositions, the tunes she chose and her unique musical perspective on them, her musical imagination and maturity, and most of all, her intention and vision are essential to bringing this exceptional trio recording to sublime fruition.

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