

## **Domestic Harmony: Piket Pays Mintz**

*Liner Notes by Roberta Piket*

The idea to record this music came to me as my husband neared a landmark birthday. Billy Mintz is not an easy man to shop for. His material happiness doesn't require much beyond some vintage drums, a few hats, and a couple of lasagna pans.

On the more ephemeral side, he also has the respect and admiration of his peers as a drummer and, increasingly, as a composer. I am one of those musicians who appreciates Billy's direct, personal approach to composition; so the ideal birthday gift occurred to me before I even had time to ponder: record a CD's worth of Billy's tunes in the solo piano format.

The joy of presenting Billy with a unique gift was heightened by the opportunity to explore his music. Billy's compositions have an open quality which gives the performer the freedom to put forth her own viewpoint. Yet in every piece, I hear Billy's distinct voice and vision. It's a voice free of grandiosity, music pared down to its essence without unnecessary elaboration.

**Ghost Sanctuary** is one of my favorite Mintz tunes. Recorded by Billy's Two Bass Band on 2015's *The Two Bass Band... Live*, its haunting melody and hypnotic 5-4 vamp have stayed with me since I first heard it.

**Beautiful You** is a lovely melody. Billy received harmonic assistance during the writing process from the great pianist Mike Garson, who is Billy's oldest and dearest friend. (Thanks, Mike!) Back in the 1990s, Billy was still asking his colleagues for help getting the harmony he heard in his head onto paper. In recent years his piano chops have improved to the point where he can work out the chords with little or no assistance.

One evening Billy and I were walking down a Manhattan side street and noticed sparkly bits embedded in the concrete. Billy observed that looking at them was like "looking down at the stars," which I pointed out would make a great title for a tune. He soon got to work on this lovely ballad, **Looking Down at the Stars**.

Billy says that **Shmear** is based on a drum sticking pattern. The solo form is "time, no changes" which provides for the momentum of a "burner" tune with the harmonic flexibility of more free-form jazz. Billy is usually reluctant to tell band members how to solo, preferring instead to hire musicians who will intuit the "right thing" to do. But in this case, when we play it with his band, his standing request is that I play lines; not textures, not chords, just lines, while the rhythm section walks at a fast tempo. Despite the absence of a rhythm section, I tried to remain true to his vision of the tune in this adaptation.

**Flight** is quickly becoming a jazz standard among musicians on both coasts with a deep and abiding love and respect for Billy's artistry and dedication, a loose federation facetiously referred to by some of its members as the "Church of Billy Mintz". It's a particularly fun tune to play with its cascading ii-V-I's in multiple key centers. When we play this tune at home, Billy likes to push me to play it faster and faster. It becomes an exercise in chops, stamina, and, above all, relaxation. I paid tribute to this aspect of our home practice sessions by increasing the tempo at the start of each of the last three choruses.

Billy wrote both the lyrics and music to **Destiny**. I felt I owed him a vocal version: he's frequently encouraged me to sing this song, and strongly supported my vocal efforts in general.

**Your Touch** is one of the few tunes on this recording that is not in the regular repertoire of Billy's bands, so it doesn't get played publicly. It has sentimental value for me because it's the first tune for which I helped Billy write chord changes, soon after we met.

I have no idea what the title **Blinds Eye** means, and neither does Billy. We refer to this as the "tune with the Daahoud bridge," which is not entirely accurate, but close enough. By the way, if the bridge makes you think that this is a "bebop" tune, then you need to take another listen to the entire melody.

**Ugly Beautiful**, first recorded on Billy's 2013 CD, *Mintz Quartet*, and reprised as the title track on his 2017 quintet CD, is a harmonically and rhythmically dense work in 7-4 / 5-4 compound meter. It has its roots in a 5-4 arrangement I wrote of Jimmy Webb's tune, *Up, Up and Away*, almost two decades ago. Both the original pop tune and my arrangement are almost undetectable in Billy's piece. As the saying goes, "good artists borrow, but great artists steal."

**Cannonball** is a 24-bar blues. It's simple, with an utterly engaging groove, and a lot of fun to play.

Billy has indulged my desire to publicly release this music and demonstrate how much it means to me; however, he is an extremely private person. So rather than risk embarrassing him by delving more deeply into the man and his music, I will simply close with this wish: Happy birthday, Billy!