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Grand Pianoramax Releases Self-Titled Debut Nu-Jazz Album

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Imagine: Herbie Hancock and Mike Clark working out a new composition before the rest of the Headhunters arrive for rehearsal. Vince Guaraldi conjuring Rockefeller Square ice skaters as Colin Bailey swings in 5/4 time. Brian Eno and Laurie Anderson doodling on a Moog and a Rhodes while Clyde Stubblefield blesses the proceedings with Swiss-precision rhythms.

These are comparative impressions of "Starlite," "Feudor" and "Cosmodrome" - the first three of eight richly evocative pieces that comprise keyboardist **Leo Tardin's** debut album, ***Grand Pianoramax*** - a project of brilliant duets with drummers **Jojo Mayer** and **Ferenc Nemeth**. Tardin - 1st Prize Winner of the **1999 Montreux Jazz Festival International Piano Solo Competition** - has been experimenting with this format for several years now, arriving at engaging spacious soundscapes that defy easy categorization. His impeccably layered musical panoramas stand up to the scrutiny of serious listening while also being easily accessible in a meditative ambient environment.

Initially, the Geneva-born Tardin was searching for an alternative to showcase his unique approach to composition - a style clearly informed by jazz but not tied to its traditions. "A full band would have given my music too much of a clear direction," he explains, "but with just drums, I can really stretch out with diverse sounds, colors and styles."

Beyond the warmth of his acoustic piano and Rhodes electric piano, it is Tardin's utilization of the Minimoog synthesizer in tandem with his collaborators' juxtaposed rhythms that makes his music so expansive. "It is, by far, the most flexible synthesizer," he states. "Because nothing is pre-set, you create the sound you want with filters and effects - very organic."

"I started to write this music for solo piano for the competition at Montreux," he continues. "Then I decided that working with just a drummer would be perfect. I would have the harmonic and melodic freedom of the solo setting, but the drummer would give me rhythmic counterparts to interact with." Tardin performed his pieces with many different drummers, hashing out the approaches that worked best. Then, after one rehearsal and a gig at famed Joe's Pub in New York with drummer Jojo Mayer, he knew he'd found an exceptional partner. "Jojo was the ideal drummer. He has club culture integrated really well. He can play live what you would hear on programmed tracks but he has the sensitivity of a jazz drummer, only he can play in more styles than just jazz."

With minimal rehearsal, the recording of *Grand Pianoramax* took place in one day with each drummer and ObliqSound co-founder **Michele Locatelli** producing in New York. Technically, the session was quite challenging. Time being precious and fleeting required Tardin and the drummers to tap into the essence of each piece very quickly. Tardin credits the clean, elementary structure of his pieces for saving the day. "I wish we had more time to rehearse," he reveals, "but then the music would have been more polished and less spontaneous. Since the pieces have very few elements and work so well on their own, it was easy to experiment with them. I used Jojo for the pieces that had club beats and effects. I used Ferenc on 'The Walk' and 'Space Race', which both have more of a jazz ballad feel."

Outer space emerges as a recurring theme of *Grand Pianoramax*. "Space Race" is a nod to the Soviet Union and the United States' probes into the final frontier. "The Walk," with its slow rhythmic lope and delay-triggered bass line, sounds like the first 'giant steps' on the moon. And "Tranquille," the project's closing solo piano meditation, conjures the calm of deep space. "Space is very fascinating for me from a scientific point of view as well as a more poetic point of view," Tardin muses. "It's beautiful, untouched and I've always been attracted to it."

Loosely composed yet wide open to improvisation, Tardin's music is a kinetic hybrid tailor-made for the ObliqSound aesthetic. "I am very happy with ObliqSound and the freedom I was given to pursue the musical direction I wanted. I guess one could classify it as 'nu jazz,' a mix of club beats and jazz - electronic and acoustic - that is developing well, especially in Europe. I've played festivals there where people sit and listen, and in clubs where people dance. The music has one foot in both worlds."

Club culture is clearly embracing *Grand Pianoramax*. In September 2004 the first single of the album, "Starlite" was released to rave reviews. With remixes by **Nuspirit Helsinki** and **Domu**, the 12" single quickly became a crate essential receiving positive thumbs up from many of the leading heavyweights of the nu jazz/broken-beat scene. To name a few: **Rainer Trüby**, **Jazzanova**, **Michael Rütten**, **Patrick Forge**, **Mr. Scruff**, **Laurent Garnier**, **Osunlade**, **Atjazz**, and many others have stamped their seals of approval on *Grand Pianoramax*. Even legendary vibraphonist **Roy Ayers** chimed in with positive remarks for the album liner notes.

Not surprisingly, this music has grown even further since its recording. Leo toured Europe in September/October 2004 playing these pieces with other drummers, taking them in completely different styles and directions. *Grand Pianoramax* hits the road again spring 2005 to support the album release. The possibilities, clearly, are endless.

ObliqSound has extended its design and art synthesis to the *Grand Pianoramax* CD. Opulent design from **K Lab** of New York and package manufacturing from **Herzog & IDEX** of Germany enhance the brilliance of **Jorg Badura's** "Walking Man" photography. Simply beautiful, and unmistakably ObliqSound.

Early Reactions:

"Fresh new music. We will continue to hear great things from *Grand Pianoramax* in the future." **Roy Ayers**

"One of the best things I've heard all year." **Atjazz**, in reference to "Starlite" single

"A must have." **De:Bug Magazine**, in reference to "Starlite" single

***Grand Pianoramax* (OS 009) to be released March 1, 2005 on ObliqSound**