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Lionel Loueke's Trio –GILFEMA releases self-titled album (OS 504)

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The sound of three vibrant cultures flowing as one over an open tributary of jazz. That's Gilfema: a guitar, bass and drums trio effortlessly casting spells with compositions as intricate and purposeful as they are soothing and meditative. After years of studying, playing and touring - together and, individually, with others - classically trained astral jazz travelers Gilfema debut on ObliqSound with a transfixing eponymous CD, *Gilfema* (OS 504).

Gilfema is West African guitarist **Lionel Loueke**, Swedish-Italian bassist **Massimo Biolcati** and Hungarian drummer **Ferenc Nemeth**. Their name is an amalgam of the leading syllables of their first names (note: Lionel's middle name is Gilles, which he is more commonly addressed as back home in Benin). The gentlemen met in 1999 at the esteemed **Berklee College of Music** in Boston. Playing together in different settings, they were amazed at how naturally their styles meshed.

However, it wasn't until all three of them - via totally separate auditions - were selected to come to Los Angeles for two years as part of the **Thelonious Monk Institute's** prestigious jazz program in 2001. There, as members of a hand-picked international septet, they rehearsed for three hours a day, five days a week. The trio was so taken with each other that they stayed after rehearsals to experiment as a threesome. "We were not consciously thinking of developing anything together," Ferenc states. "We had a connection from the very beginning and it all came together organically. A strong trust has developed something much deeper. We still surprise each other with how better it constantly gets."

They started out deconstructing standards, re-harmonizing them and/or rearranging them in odd meters. Then they moved into approaching each others' compositions. Soon, a style all their own emerged. Between playing at the Institute with stellar guests such as **Wayne Shorter, Dave Holland, Kenny Barron** and **Lewis Nash**, they did trio gigs around Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley at **Temple Bar, La Ve' Lee** and **Catalina Bar & Grill**.

It was while touring with the Monk Institute in Belgium that they entered a competition as a trio. They needed a name and came up with Gilfema. Having this name further bonded the soul mates and they made a vow to take what they were doing to another level. Though a technicality kept them from the competition's finals, they concluded their two years with the Monk Institute, then individually made their way to New York City where they reunited.

All three members were busy working with various musicians. In October of 2003, Ferenc began working with ObliqSound artist **Tama Waipara**, subsequently garnering a succession of gigs with other artists on the roster. Through his association with ObliqSound producer & co-founder **Michele Locatelli**, Ferenc passed a demo of Gilfema's music his way and the group was swiftly

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signed.

The Gilfema sound weaves quite the hypnotic tapestry. Lionel's haunting voice, resonant hollow body guitar and keenly rhythmic sensibilities mesh with Massimo's fluidly melodic acoustic bass playing (he used to play guitar as well) and the cornucopia of complex patterns that Ferenc taps out on drums and percussion.

Emphasizing interplay and composition, Gilfema steers clear of showy displays of chops. Indeed, one key reason Locatelli was transfixed by the group was the apparently effortless symbiosis of their multi-cultural backgrounds, and their respect for song form. Beyond playing, the trio discusses music conceptually in their quest for refreshing new directions.

"We wanted to get away from playing in a straight ahead way," Massimo explains. "Ferenc and I lock into odd meters while Lionel stretches the harmonies with chordal substitutions that I follow harmonically. Those basics remain and are developing still. We've created a language based on our own approaches - reaching out to each other to create a common language. We don't try hard to be different. Striving to be original, a lot has come naturally."

The fruit of this effortless interconnectedness was reaped during the recording sessions for their debut. The longtime friends were so focused and cohesive that they cut the entire album in two days...nine of the thirteen numbers on Day 1.

Though Lionel's astoundingly singular artistic sensibilities have rendered him a high profile contributor to acclaimed recordings and tours with **Herbie Hancock**, **Terence Blanchard** and **Charlie Haden**, the guitarist/composer/singer is passionately committed to the growth and greater exposure of the Gilfema esthetic. "There is no leader in the group," he says firmly. "We decide everything together. We are all good listeners and very open minded about different music. And since none of us are American, we all bring our cultural influences to the music."

Submerge yourself in the magical mystery music of Gilfema - a sound that buoyantly bobs and bops beyond category.

ObliqSound has extended its design and art synthesis to the Gilfema CD. Opulent design from **K Lab** of New York and package manufacturing from **Herzog & IDEX** of Germany. The result is a distinct artistic work, both as a musical production and beautiful object.