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LIONEL LOUEKE, FERENC NEMETH, AND MASSIMO BIOLCATI REVEAL UNIQUE JAZZ, WORLD PERSPECTIVE ON HIGHLY-ANTICIPATED FOLLOW-UP ALBUM GILFEMA + 2

Gilfema's Second ObliqSound Album Adds Guest Performers Anat Cohen and John Ellis

NEW YORK — When Gilfema released its self-titled debut album on ObliqSound in 2005, they effectively put an end to any lingering doubts that jazz, although undeniably rooted in America, had evolved into a truly international art form. Here were a guitarist/vocalist, Lionel Loueke, from the West African nation of Benin; a bassist, Massimo Biolcati, who grew up in Sweden and Italy; and a drummer, Ferenc Nemeth, from Hungary—all coming together in New York City. That first Gilfema release received rave reviews—*Downbeat* called it “hypnotic” and the *Guardian UK* described it as “intelligent feel-good music.” Now Gilfema has returned to take it to the next level. *Gilfema + 2*, the followup to that auspicious, cross-cultural introductory statement, will be released by ObliqSound this October, starting in the UK (Oct 6), France (Oct 9) and then the USA and Canada (October 28).

If the Loueke-Biolcati-Nemeth lineup sounds familiar but the name Gilfema does not, that isn't some tricky déjà vu at work—the same three musicians also perform as the Lionel Loueke Trio. Biolcati and Nemeth served as integral creative components of Loueke's solo debut for ObliqSound, 2006's *Virgin Forest*, which also featured percussionist Cyro Baptista, vocalist Gretchen Parlato and keyboard legend Herbie Hancock among its guests (Loueke later returned the favor by playing on Hancock's Grammy-winning album *River: The Joni Letters*). Another critical triumph, *Virgin Forest* received rave reviews from jazz and world music press, prompting *JazzTimes* to proclaim the album “utterly compelling. The title track, which closes the album, is a wonder to behold.”

But despite sharing personnel, Gilfema deliberately projects an entirely different vibe than the Lionel Loueke Trio. In Gilfema, all three players write music, whereas neither Biolcati nor Nemeth contribute material to the projects credited solely to Loueke. Similarly, Biolcati and Nemeth are the masters of their own solo works, each having released their debuts as band leaders in the past year. The musicians find that creating and maintaining these strict distinctions ultimately benefits them when Gilfema comes together. Even the name Gilfema—extracted from Lionel *GIL*les Loueke (his friends and family call him Gilles), *F*erenc Nemeth and *MA*ssimo Biolcati—is intended to emphasize the collaborative nature of the music created under this moniker.

“The fact that we all put out our own solo projects made us stronger,” says Nemeth. “We're not just three sidemen, but three individuals coming together and bringing something new.”

Gilfema + 2 was recorded in all of two days last February at Knoop Studio in River Edge, New Jersey, with Juan Pablo Alcaro engineering. Its melodically luminous, rhythmically propulsive sound is indicative of the electricity that was constantly in the air as the musicians and producer Michele Locatelli, the president of ObliqSound, laid down the tracks. The resultant music—built around the kind of intuitive interactivity that can only come from years of making music together—suggests numerous influences from around the globe, yet it's impossible to pin down, other than to say that it reflects both where these musicians have come from and where they are right now. There's a serenity that coats the entire proceedings, but an intensity as well, fueled, perhaps, by the artists' unflagging enthusiasm to create something previously unheard. No strutting, no flash, nothing to prove—other than the truth that the connections forged by like-minded artists investigating the possibilities of the creative spirit can result in music that's made to last.

One of the most significant elements of the sophomore Gilfema recording, however, is that it isn't a trio recording at all but one by a quintet, hence the + 2 of the title. The number refers to the guest clarinetists, Anat Cohen, playing a B-flat clarinet, and John Ellis, on bass clarinet and ocarina.



“The idea to add the clarinets came up after a brainstorming session where we considered trumpet, marimba, vibraphone and even a choir,” says Locatelli. “But then Lionel himself proposed to use two clarinets, an idea that we all liked immediately. We all wanted to avoid a typical jazz sound and look for something timeless and genre-defying. Anat and John, both superb musicians, came to mind immediately as the ideal players.”

“The sound of the trio plus two is much bigger,” adds Loueke, explaining how the new album departs from the first, “and the writing is different. You can still hear that it’s *Gilfema*, but it’s a new *Gilfema*.”

The 10 tracks that comprise the intricate yet unfussy *Gilfema + 2* succeed in establishing a more refined group identity for *Gilfema*, while showcasing the individual abilities and artistic goals of the three core members. With an eagerness to embrace geographically and stylistically diverse sounds, and with an indefatigable curiosity and spirit, *Gilfema* manages to be both transformative and comfortable.

The breadth of sounds and emotions that saturate *Gilfema + 2* is evident right from the opening track, “Twins,” with its intricate rhythmic structure, counterpoint harmonies and understated yet undeniably virtuosic solos. Penned by Loueke in honor of friend and producer Locatelli’s newborn twin daughters, “Twins” gives notice that *Gilfema + 2* offers an intensive listening experience while serving equally well as a pastoral soundscape. That sense of adventure carries all the way through to Biolcati’s “Master of the Obvious,” the album’s closer. The song brings together all of the album’s elements, as the trio restates its devotion to exploration and its guests extend the song’s possibilities in unexpected ways.

“It’s hard to explain, but simplicity and joy...that is characteristic of *Gilfema*,” says Biolcati. In early 2008, *The New York Times* called the three young musicians members of an elite group of “international artists dealing seriously with jazz without tuning out their native cultures.” That integrity is apparent on *Karibu*, Loueke’s recent album release on Blue Note Records; in every critically celebrated performance as a member of Herbie Hancock’s touring band; and on *Persona* and *Night Songs*, Biolcati and Nemeth’s respective solo projects. But *Gilfema* allows Loueke, Nemeth, and Biolcati, by establishing a separate entity, to step further outside of the box, to reject category and redefine who they are and what they can be.

“We tried to keep it a little farther from jazz maybe, a little more into grooves,” says Biolcati about *Gilfema + 2*. “We’re used to being on the same level of creativity, so it was very easy going into *Gilfema*. Also, we were lucky to have two great musicians playing with us, not only because the texture of the sound was different, but because they’re great soloists and improvisers so they enriched the music with their personalities.”

Adds Loueke, “It’s the moment. Every day we play is for me a new experience, a new learning process. The best performance for me always has to be the last one.”

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