

HUMAN FEEL Welcome to Malpesta

New World Records 80450

Welcome to Malpesta!

You've been traveling, maybe for years, through lands that sounded new when you read the brochure but turned out to be disappointingly familiar once you arrived.

Malpesta is different. No luxury liner calls at this port; no visa is required. Malpesta is where voyages begin.

Don't worry about the language. Anyone can speak Human Feel. "Sich Reped" and "Sphasos Triem" may look odd on paper, but once you hear them you'll agree with instant fluency, "Undral Malpest Seam!"

Tour the Greenway, and stop for a picnic at Pith. Be sure to sample at least five of the many local olive oils, pressed an hour ago. Take time to admire the water view at Iceaquay, where tides converge in many moods. A moment of Retrogression may sway you at the falls, but then you meet Kaleema. It's time to dance, a prayerful duet.

You may want to change *all* your money.

NO ROOM FOR SLEEPIN'

This ensemble resists description, and that's no bad thing.

As jazz approaches its second century, it has earned—for good or otherwise—its critical language, every well-weighed word of which encounters zero gravity in the Human Feel atmosphere. With no bandleader, no "front line," and no bass, these four very individual players—all under thirty years old—have freed themselves from the conventional jazz-quartet structure and its attendant baggage of expectations to form a four-cornered unit that's anything but rectilinear.

This is not to say that they reject tradition. But instead of referring to what has gone before, they encounter jazz on their own terms. They can play as if possessed by the spirits that rejoiced through the Ayler brothers more than a lifetime ago, yet their songwriting is intricately contemporary in structure, requiring precision as well as passion. As with the best of the avant-garde in any genre, Human Feel applies new values that challenge received wisdom with compelling integrity and force.

Empathy is foremost. In an era that has canonized improvisational music till there's almost no way to be surprised any more, their chapter and verse is the personal—and it works. Three of the four have played together since high school days, and all have developed an uncommon closeness that's essential to Human Feel's characteristic sound. You can hear them listening to each other, reevaluating, reacting; there's both urgency and joy in the process. Every moment is charged with meaning, yet it's clear throughout that these are also guys having fun—really, really talented guys having fun.

And though their tunes require stop-on-a-dime deftness, when one Human (the one from Philadelphia) says, "There's no room for sleeping," he's not just talking about the alertness and technique this music demands. With all the openness these Humans afford each other, nobody straggles, even for a second. Not a breath or note is wasted. Solos make sense. It's clear that, young as they are, they know their time—and yours—is too precious to take any but the most direct route to the truth.

Their approach sometimes resembles more solitary arts, like sculpture or poetry: What's *not* presented has everything to do with what occurs. That pursuit is even trickier than it sounds. Nearly any musician can emit a torrent of notes; technical facility alone will not make them cohere. The members of this group are dedicated to playing only what's essential, a focus they maintain uncompromisingly. The result is absorbing, disciplined in content yet free in spirit; it's music that holds--and repays--your attention from the first note to the last.

In each uniquely detailed tune, questions are posed and issues addressed with honesty and clarity and, often, humor as well. Both writing and playing resolutely defy anticipation. Change is always expected, but the quality of change remains suspenseful in each interaction. Some melodies corner swiftly, switchbacks matched by drumming as close as your heartbeat. Others unfold with measured grace, fill with emotion, then explode into ecstatic blowing; or shift from dense collective statement into expansive spaces through which a single quiet voice makes its way. Group exchanges may be quizzical, even bantering, or rapturous almost to the point of tears.

No individual instrument dominates any tune. This is a true unit, not merely a foursome of versatile soloists. Taking full advantage of the expressive possibilities of its unusual line-up of drums, electric guitar and reeds (tenor sax, clarinet, alto sax, and bass clarinet), Human Feel offers gorgeous sonic epiphanies: searing tenor over muttering bass clarinet; reflective alto and pointillistic drumming; guitar that can growl ominously, chord impressionistically, or blend keening with paired saxophones.

At times it's difficult for the ear to unravel the strings from the reeds, so intimately do they entwine; elsewhere guitar and tenor unreel long, attenuated lines gradually from the back of the mix to the front, joining the bass clarinet at the climax of a solo. Drums patter conversationally, or roll like a gyroscope into an over-the-beat dance step for alto. Each player is equally apt to support or to comment. Over the course of a Human Feel set, the six instruments combine in nearly every available permutation, for music that's as fresh and varied in texture as it is in content. The only constant is the mutual attentiveness that distinguishes this band's every performance.

Though each Human is a skilled improviser with an impressive resume, touring and recording with a number of world-class groups, name-dropping is very much beside the point for this ensemble. The frequency of all their outside work conspires to draw the four apart again and again, but they all agree that its diversity also enriches the ever-evolving relationship that's the soul of Human Feel. What they play and hear on their travels becomes part of what they bring back to the group when they return. Nor does their journeying end there. On any given day in their Brooklyn kitchen you're likely to find one or more of the Humans assembling a salad while listening to Bulgarian music. Or it might be Bartok, Hermeto Pascoal, or some Middle Eastern percussion. Any of this might find its way, transformed, into their playing; keeping their ears open, they keep their sound alive.

Still, unity remains paramount. "These guys understand," as one fellow musician puts it, describing that sought-after element you hear when a collection of individuals becomes, astoundingly, a whole. That's why no two songs on this recording sound alike, but every one sounds like nothing but Human Feel.

Welcome to Malpesta!

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Although the first two Human Feel CDs were recorded in Boston, the group's origins reach back to early-1980s Seattle, the home of Andrew D'Angelo (born 1965), Chris Speed (born 1967), and Jim Black (also born 1967). The three attended different high schools, but became friends while playing in a big band that worked frequently in the area. Their paths diverged after graduation; but like generations of talented young musicians, all three wound up in Boston. Chris arrived to study at the New England Conservatory; Jim attended and taught at the Berklee College of Music. Andrew, meanwhile, determined to document his playing, followed a different course of study in the same Back Bay neighborhood: He learned the music business from the ground up, running the jazz department of the biggest record store in town.

That all three were more than distinguished students was clear when they issued the first Human Feel CD in 1989. Two years later a second self-produced tape caught the eminent ears of Gunther Schuller, who issued it on his GM label. Philadelphian Kurt Rosenwinkel (born 1970), another Berklee student, had become the group's guitarist by this time; soon afterward, their bassist left town, and Human Feel became a quartet.

Their studies concluded, the move to New York was inevitable: the group now works out of a Park Slope, Brooklyn brownstone. But both of their former homes still resonate in their careers. Boston's educational atmosphere makes for what Chris remembers as "a great meeting place, musically, with people from all over the world, bringing all kinds of ideas--that's a key to growth." Andrew agrees: "Playing with so many different people helped me develop my music: my compositions, my musicianship. And every year new, younger musicians arrive--the scene is constantly in flux." Kurt spent the shortest time in town, but still acknowledges: "I met most of the people I'm playing with now in the two and a half years I was in Boston." And Jim Black credits the liberal-arts courses he took alongside his music studies with helping him see that "there's another way to approach music: you want to be able to talk about it without *naming* it. Because when you do that, you're screwed."

On Human Feel's first tour, they visited Seattle and played for an audience that included family, old friends, and new listeners like Wayne Horvitz, who ultimately produced this disc for New World Records. What he heard that night is well represented here: Like its two predecessors, "Welcome to Malpesta" was recorded live to 2-track. In their two days of recording, Human Feel played together in one room, three sets from start to finish, exactly as they would onstage.

—Louisa Hufstader

Louisa Hufstader has hosted jazz and other radio programs on several Boston-area radio stations since 1978. She has reviewed recordings for the Boston Globe and Number and written liner notes for numerous artists and labels.

Executive producer: Arthur Moorhead

Producer: Wayne Horvitz
Engineer: James Farber
Recorded April 3 and 4, 1994 at Power Station, NYC.
Mastered May 5, 1994 at Soundbyte, NYC.
Cover design: Stephen Byram

This disc was recorded direct to 1/2" analog 2-track from a Neve 8068 mixing console, using minimal microphones. The following tube microphones were used: AKG C24, Neumann U47, and Telefunken 251.

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- 1 Sich Reped (A. D'Angelo) 5:57
- 2 Iceaquay (C. Speed) 9:06
- 3 Undral Malpest Seam (A. D'Angelo) 2:27
- 4 Retrogression (C. Speed) 9:09
- 5 Sphasos Triem (A. D'Angelo) 5:52
- 6 An Hour Ago (K. Rosenwinkel) 8:49
- 7 Moods (A. D'Angelo) 2:09
- 8 Kaleema (A. D'Angelo) 4:45
- 9 Greenway (A. D'Angelo) 3:13
- 10 Pith (C. Speed) 9:21
- 11 Duet (arr. C. Speed) 3:03

An Hour Ago published by Zbigniew Music (BMI). *Sphasos Triem*, *Sich Reped*, *Greenway*, *Moods*, *Undral Malpest Seam* and *Kaleema* are published by Sich Reped Music (BMI). *Iceaquay*, *Retrogression*, and *Pith* are published by Sponty Music (BMI).

Andrew D'Angelo--alto sax, bass clarinet
Chris Speed--tenor sax, clarinet

Kurt Rosenwinkel--guitar
Jim Black--drums

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