

Jasmine, duet recordings from Keith Jarrett and Charlie Haden

By Hiram Lee
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The reunion of pianist Keith Jarrett and bassist Charlie Haden on the new album *Jasmine* is a welcome event for jazz music lovers. Prior to this recording, the veteran musicians had not worked together in three decades, when they were both members of Jarrett's "American Quartet."

Jarrett's American Quartet of the 1970s—featuring Haden on bass; Paul Motian, formerly a member of Bill Evans' extraordinary trio, on drums; and the late Dewey Redman on tenor saxophone—was a lively, experimental group, which sought to blend together a number of influences, including gospel, R&B, straight-ahead and "free" or "avant-garde" jazz. While not all of their experiments perhaps proved fruitful, their strongest recordings, including the albums *Expectations* (1971) and *Fort Yawuh* (1973), merit listening.

The music the two have produced upon reuniting is some of their most mature and sensitive work together. It is an album well worth hearing.

The project had its origins in the filming of a documentary about Haden during 2007, in which Jarrett was asked to participate. After filming, the two played together briefly and decided to reunite for a recording session at Jarrett's home studio. The sessions finished, Jarrett and Haden took three years to carefully select and assemble the best of their new recordings for release on *Jasmine*.

Like so much of Jarrett's recent work, *Jasmine* is focused on standards; in this case, primarily love songs. Among the compositions included here are the classic "Body and Soul," "Goodbye," famously recorded by Benny Goodman in the 1930s, and Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's "Don't Ever Leave Me." The album bears some similarities, in both its theme and approach, to Jarrett's 1999 release *The Melody at*

Night, a *Swish* recording *Yonf* performed in Jarrett's home studio.

On both albums, Jarrett abandons some of the more aggressive pyrotechnics he is known for playing, in favor of a more sensitive approach. On *Jasmine*, melody takes center stage. Jarrett's improvisations are moving, always staying within the emotional context of the composition. Solos build directly off the melody as though they were an elaboration of its theme. As Jarrett himself writes in the album's liner notes, "These are great love songs played by players who are trying, mostly, to keep the message intact."

In his own solos, Haden also lets the music breathe; his playing is lyrical, deceptively simple. Haden plays with a remarkably full tone, deep and resonant.

One can say, thankfully, that these are musicians who are not trying to prove something about *themselves*. This is honest music—not something at which one so easily arrives. As Jarrett suggests in his liner notes, many recordings from the *Jasmine* sessions were left off the final album because, as he writes, "I wanted only the distilled essence of what we had, and it took some time to wean ourselves from going for hip solos or unevenly played tunes (even though they had wonderful things inside them)." Songs added to the album were those which the artists felt had "moments of surrender to their mood while retaining their essential integrity."

For the most part, the song choices on *Jasmine* come as a surprise. On an album of standards recorded today, one doesn't often expect to see songs such as "I'm Gonna Laugh You Right Out of My Life" or the 1934 pop tune "For All We Know."

One of the most interesting aspects of Jarrett's career in recent years, particularly with his Standards Trio, has been the rediscovery of some overlooked American

popular songs. This album continues that effort.

Familiar standards like “Body and Soul” and “Goodbye” are memorably performed here as well, feeling as fresh and alive as ever. The two musicians judiciously navigate Joe Sample’s composition “One Day I’ll Fly Away”—a song which, in the wrong hands, can lend itself to melodrama.

Keith Jarrett and Charlie Haden are among the more talented and interesting performers to have emerged in jazz music during the 1960s and 1970s. They deserve to be heard. Jarrett’s recordings with the Charles Lloyd Quartet during the 1960s and, in particular, his solo concert recordings of entirely improvised music—particularly the 1975 *Köln Concert* album—are significant.

Haden was a member of alto saxophonist Ornette Coleman’s groundbreaking quartet of the early 1960s, and the albums produced by that band, especially *The Shape of Jazz to Come* (1959), *This is Our Music* (1960) and *Free Jazz* (1961), are essential.

Jasmine is a welcome addition to the catalogues of both artists.

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