



JIMMY GREENE BEAUTIFUL LIFE

"Music has a unique way of communicating and healing. I'm so thankful that music is my profession - that I am able to write and arrange to create settings that convey the emotions I experience, not the least of which is the pain that my family and I have endured at a time when words fail." – Jimmy Greene

Jimmy Greene's new release, ***Beautiful Life*** on Mack Avenue Records, is a celebration of the life of his 6-year-old daughter, Ana Márquez-Greene, whose life was tragically taken, along with 19 other children and 6 educators, on December 14, 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.

"I want the music to reflect the way that Ana lived," Greene says. He fulfills that mandate with an intense, cohesive, genre-spanning program—juxtaposing the hardcore instrumental jazz for which he is best known with traditional spirituals, contemporary Christian music, standard ballads and three original songs framing his own lyrics. Animating the repertoire is a gold-standard rhythm section (Renee Rosnes, piano; Christian McBride, bass; Lewis Nash, drums), augmented at various points by guitarists Pat Metheny and Jonathan DuBose, Jr.; pianists Kenny Barron and Cyrus Chestnut; vocalists Kurt Elling, Javier Colon and Latanya Farrell; spoken word from Tony Award®-winning actress Anika Noni Rose; a 13-piece string ensemble from the Hartford Symphony Orchestra; as well as an accomplished children's choir.

Greene himself is one of the most respected saxophonists of his generation since graduating from Hartt School of Music in 1997. He composed or arranged every selection and plays tenor and soprano saxophones as well as flute with customary authority, melodic focus and abiding soulfulness.

"In the days after my daughter was killed, playing and writing music wasn't even a thought," the 39-year-old saxophonist says. "I was very much in shock, grieving deeply and trying to just function coherently. Family and friends surrounded us and held us up, and we received 10,000 communications—emails, texts, Facebook messages, voice calls, letters—from people around the world. The community of musicians was front and center for that support. When I called, they responded, 'Whatever you need, just say the word, and I'll be there.'"

In late January 2013, Greene, feeling that "I needed to get back to some sense of routine," resumed a regimen of practice and composition. Soon thereafter, Norman Chesky, the co-owner of Chesky Records and HDtracks, reached out with an extraordinary offer.

"An intense amount of media attention was focused on my family and all of us in Newtown, so I was fairly guarded whenever communicating with someone for the first time," Greene relates. "But Norman offered to donate the production of a recording that I could do whenever I was ready, and to give me complete ownership. I was humbled and honored by his generosity, and began to devote my energies to the project."

Greene decided to weave lyrics and singers into the flow for the first time on one of his recordings. "Ana loved to sing and listen to singers, and had a wonderful singing voice," he explains. "So an album dedicated to her memory needed to have singers and songs that were important to her and me and my family."

Beautiful Life opens with a recording of Ana singing the traditional "Saludos" ("Greetings") at a Christmas celebration (*parranda*) in Puerto Rico with her mother Nelba Márquez-Greene's family—and her father playing in the background—a year before her death. Greene segues to a section in which he and guitarist Pat Metheny perform "Come Thou Almighty King" before concluding with another family recording of Ana singing the hymn to her brother Isaiah's piano accompaniment.

The wistful “Last Summer,” a quartet feature, evokes Greene’s impressions of the photograph of his children—captured from the rear with their arms around each other’s shoulders in the family’s backyard in Winnipeg, Canada, where Greene taught at the University of Manitoba between 2009 and 2012—that appears on the cover of *Beautiful Life*.

The mellow tenor voice of Javier Colon, Greene’s one-time classmate at Hartt who won the 2011 edition of NBC’s *The Voice*, delivers Greene’s lyric for “When I Come Home” supported by the quartet, Greene’s signifying tenor saxophone and the strings.

Greene initially recorded “Ana’s Way” instrumentally as “Ana Grace” on the 2009 recording *Mission Statement*. Complementing Grammy® Award-winner Kurt Elling’s characteristically penetrating, graceful interpretation is the Linden Christian School Early Years Choir, comprising classmates of Ana and Isaiah in Winnipeg; solos by Greene and Rosnes distill the oceanic emotions of the lyric. “It was brutal seeing Ana’s friends again, without Ana there amongst them,” Greene says. “But we got through it somehow, and I think the results are very touching.”

Iconic pianist Kenny Barron joins Greene for conversational readings of the Broadway songs “Where Is Love?” from *Oliver* and “Maybe” from *Annie*, the latter featuring Greene’s pure-toned soprano saxophone. “Kenny, Christian and Lewis were the rhythm section for the 1996 Thelonious Monk Competition, where I was named first runner-up,” Greene recalls. “They made me feel welcomed and comfortable, that I could do this for my life, and so I wanted them involved.”

“My daughter loved *Annie*, and would sing ‘Maybe’ a cappella with great pitch and rhythm in the back of the car when we were driving around,” Greene recalls. He includes “Where Is Love” in homage to Jackie McLean, his primary musical mentor, who showed Greene, then 15, the melody at their first meeting at Hartford’s Artists Collective.

The penultimate track of *Beautiful Life*, titled “Prayer,” is Greene’s musical setting of the text of the “Lord’s Prayer.” Cyrus Chestnut accompanies Greene’s devotional tenor saxophone; illuminating the message is Latanya Farrell (who Greene met while attending Hartt), whose powerful contralto enchanted Ana as a toddler.

Ana became a fan of Anika Noni Rose—a high school classmate of Greene’s in Bloomfield, Connecticut—after hearing her inhabit the role of Princess Tiana in the animated film *The Princess and the Frog*. Rose’s recitation of Greene’s optimistic soliloquy “Little Voices” precedes another appearance by the Linden Children’s Choir.

“Many people have asked what they can do to help, and this is my answer,” Greene says. “Let’s remember what happened at Sandy Hook. We can each hold up our end of the bargain, which is to somehow learn to love ourselves, and then see past ourselves and love our neighbor. That’s pretty simple, but if we all did it, I think our existence would be different.”

A portion of the proceeds from *Beautiful Life* will be donated to the following charities in Ana’s name:

- *The Ana Grace Project of Klingberg Family Centers—initiated by Greene’s wife Nelba, a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, to promote love, community and connection for every child and family through partnerships with schools, mental health providers, community organizations and faith leaders.*
- *The Artists Collective—where generations of children and families in Greater Hartford have gained access to world-class training in the arts*

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