



YELLOWJACKETS *RAISING OUR VOICE*

While the Los Angeles-based **Yellowjackets** have been a creative force on the jazz scene since 1981 when they recorded their eponymous debut, their fourth **Mack Avenue Records** album, ***Raising Our Voice***, once again ups the ante with bold new strides by inviting vocalist extraordinaire **Luciana Souza** to collaborate with the group for seven of its thirteen tunes as well as subtly taking a resistant stand against the status quo of the cultural and political undercurrent of our times.

The Yellowjackets have consistently forged ahead in their evolving artistic statements. The band has recorded close to 30 albums, been nominated for 17 GRAMMY® Awards, and has adventurously amplified the eclectic, electro-acoustic soundscape, creating a unique jazz sound since its fusion beginnings.

“The band keeps moving forward,” says saxophonist **Bob Mintzer** who joined the group in 1990. “It’s one of the few partnership bands in the last four decades. It’s democratic, laissez-faire and accommodating to everyone in the band to contribute. We’re constantly reinventing ourselves as a reflection of what’s happening in the world.”

The Jackets are comprised of pianist/keyboardist/co-founder **Russell Ferrante**, bassist **Dane Alderson** in his second recording with the group and drummer **Will Kennedy**, who joined the band in 1987 and then in 2000 took a 10-year hiatus before returning to the drum chair. As a relative outsider, Souza contributes wordless vocals as well as songs sung in Portuguese and English. She was quickly won over by the band.

“They’re killers,” she says. “They’re so serious yet also so much fun. We laughed a lot during the sessions. Their curiosity is alive, and their joy is to make great music. I was originally going to just do three songs, but it ended up that I’m on over half the record.”

The collection features three old Yellowjackets tunes arranged for a fresh ride with Souza’s contributions, two co-writes with Ferrante and Souza, three new originals each for Ferrante and Mintzer, and Alderson’s first original piece for the band along with two short electronics interludes.

Unlike the last album, 2015’s *Coherence*, where the music was toured before the studio recordings, ***Raising Our Voice*** grew organically from the collaborative nature of the sessions. “There was a gap between the last album and this one,” says Ferrante. “We hadn’t been playing a lot live, so most of these tunes came alive in the studio and were sparked by the electricity and chemistry with Luciana.”

Kennedy adds, “This is the album where we were the least prepared for the writing and rehearsals. It was a bit of a cram. But that gave it an excitement. And then Luciana, who came in at the last moment, was a great discovery for bringing her talents as a gift to the band.”

The Ferrante and Souza collaboration began years earlier when talking about working together. “As they were thinking of the next album, Russ came to the house and we went into my studio and we talked,” explains Souza. “He played some music and I sang along, and it was very sweet and unguarded.”

“We looked through some music that had a Brazilian feel to it,” Ferrante says. “We chose songs that lyrically fit her musicality.”

Raising Our Voice leads off with the vibrant reworking of the grooved “Man Facing North” (originally recorded on the Jackets’ 1993 album *Like A River*). Ferrante on piano and Mintzer on tenor sax take swinging breaks while Souza follows Alderson’s bass lines and sings counterpoint to the tenor with sweet, lilting wordless vocals that lift the song with storytelling.

Other Souza conversation-like contributions include the gorgeous ballad “Quiet” (she wrote the first half with Portuguese and English lyrics and Ferrante wrote the second half), the reworking of the Brazilian-tinged “Timeline” (a Ferrante

composition from the Jackets' 2011 album of the same name with Souza taking the lead with wordless vocals and conversing with Mintzer) and another re-orchestrated band number, "Solitude" from *Like A River*, written by Ferrante, with new Portuguese lyrics by the singer who playfully engages in a fetching call-and-response with both Alderson and Mintzer.

Souza also heartens Ferrante's sprightly "Everyone Else Is Taken" and spices his mysterious "In Search Of" which was inspired from a quote by Thomas Merton: "There is no one so wrong as the one who knows all the answers."

Ferrante contributes the moving, introspective tune "Mutuality," based on the Martin Luther King, Jr. speech, "Network of Mutuality." In the midst of Souza's musing support, the harmony goes through every key (minor and major). "This is a good example of making a statement but on a subtle side," he says. "It really connects to the title of the album, which has a political slant. It's about waking up to see what's going on. A lot of musicians get in their own bubbles of charts and harmony, but don't connect to the world we live in. We need to be less preoccupied and see the urgency of making music as a resistance."

Mintzer's three new songs include the deep-grooved "Ecuador" (his tenor saxophone takes the tasty role of a rhythmic instrument) and the upbeat "Strange Times." He also contributes the most unusual Yellowjackets tune, "Swinging With It," a pure swinger complete with walking bass lines. "Straight-ahead music is a big part of my legacy," he says.

A key component to ***Raising Our Voice*** is the band's stellar rhythm section of Kennedy and Alderson. "We provide a good foundation for our other band mates to stand on" says Kennedy. "Inspired by music from around the world, we all listen, grow, and incorporate those influences in our sound."

"They gave me the freedom to explore," says Alderson, the Perth, West Australia native who now lives in Virginia. "I'm a huge fan of the RC-300 Loop Station by Boss combined with the Roland VB99 midi unit, which I used on the two short pieces, 'Emerge' and 'Divert.'"

Alderson's first full composition for the Jackets is the upbeat "Brotherly," which buoys with his tumbling bass lines. "It was just a bag of ideas at first," he says. "But then I corresponded with Will and we talked about grooves. We're both big fans of the UK band Brotherly, so we were influenced by it when we put this tune together."

"It's a different and unusual snapshot of where the Yellowjackets are today," says Kennedy. "We're getting older, but we're still inspired and listening."

Mintzer sees a bright future for the Yellowjackets. "What attracts me about the group is how stylistically broad we are," he says. "There are no barriers. We're free to try new things without making the music overly complex. I always say this is the band you always wanted to be in. We'll see where we go next."

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For media inquiries, please contact:

DL Media · 610-667-0501
Matthew Jurasek · matthew@dlmediamusic.com
Maureen McFadden · maureen@dlmediamusic.com

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