

Rituals

(Laugh & Jangle CD 1006)



Eric T. Johnson	guitars
Ben Cook	piano/keyboards
Carl Clements	saxophones/flutes
Joshua Davis	bass
Bertram Lehmann	drums
Norm Bergeron	percussion

Original, melodic, globally influenced Jazz.

The music of Crosscurrent ranges from intricately composed to freely improvised. Each member of the group brings diverse influences to his composing and playing, from Indian music to Brazilian, Western classical to American folk. Jazz is the common language and love of the musicians, and is a discipline which gives them the ability to relate creatively and spontaneously to a wide range of musical expression.

“This is a wonderful and well disciplined group of artists playing an all original set of music written solely by the members of the group, with one exception, Guinnevere, penned by David Crosby. All of the musicians play in a spirited and skilled way bringing forth and utilizing an entire genre of musical expressions from all over the globe, while using jazz as the fundamental expression of their music...

Throughout all this CD there is a musicality and originality that the listener instantly becomes aware of. The musicians work harmoniously and one gets an immediate understanding of the sensitivity between them. Seeing this group performing live on a stage, I would imagine, would be intellectually invigorating for any jazz audience. “

- **Peter La Barbera, The Jazz Zine, March 2001**

“Refreshing is perhaps the best description to apply to this CD. The title is true, but there is definitely an “intersection” of influences that do not operate at cross-purpose. The blend of mood, technique and genre results in a rich smorgasbord for listeners to savor.

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The CD opens with "Intersections," a journey through a musical maze with a calm force. Don't think confusion here, the direction is crystal clear. The next gem, "North March" highlights the strong emotion of Carl Clements' singing soprano sax. The melody is relatively simple with Ben Cook giving a stellar piano performance. It's a classic piece. The intriguing "Firefly" finds Bertram Lehman's drums and Cook's electric piano balancing energy with haunting tenderness. Clements "flies" in, as the sax glides over the track with intensity.

"Guinnevere" is a beautiful gentle track with Johnson's guitar as the main support with Cook right next to him on piano. Clements' tenor sax is subdued and very elegant. It's got the "quiet storm" signature on it. "Stop & Go" mixes straight-ahead with Brazilian-type hints and city-slick soulfulness. Johnson burns on guitar and Cook lives up to his name as well. Lehmann gives a solid performance on rhythm instruments.

"Crosscurrent" holds some of the same World-mix elements as "Stop & Go," but on a softer note. It's a thinking person's track for meditation and daydreaming. The smooth theme continues with "Mirromere," as Cook again leads the pack with pensive notes and Clements flute following on the same wavelength.

"Seven of Mine" builds an intense entry and simmers down for Joshua Davis to show his stuff on bass. Very hip indeed, and it rises again for Johnson to pick up the pace with some Latin-tinged guitar. Clements soulful sax gets the steam rolling and rounds out the track.

Davis' bass lines open "Ritual" and gets the listener hypnotized and ready to follow the commands that follow from Cook and Clements. This one is true to its title as it's relatively trance-like. "Now the Day is Gone" bids farewell to a jazzland that Peter Pan would love. It takes the listener home with a grateful, but somewhat melancholy sweetness. It is filled with hope and assurance for a new day.

Crosscurrent has the kind of appeal that a photo essay provides. Its picturesque melodies give us a musical documentation through all the beauty that this ensemble could gather. They, in turn, deliver it to us with all they have. It is simple, or perhaps complex, but oh so regal. "

- **Denai Burbank, JazzReview.com**

"With the band's fourth release titled Rituals, the listener will be treated to hip, jazz-based grooves and intricately developed voicings along with a slight jazz-samba tinge and peppery rhythms on pieces such as "Stop & Go" and others. Clements' radiant flute passages and Johnson's articulate chord progressions, performed on acoustic guitar, elicits dream laden imagery on "Mirromere", whereas the band engages in some interesting harmonization and well-placed accents on "Seven Of Mine". Here, the rhythm section grabs the spotlight as they render a pumping and somewhat bouncy pulse in support of Clement's brawny yet thematically rich tenor sax soloing... "

- **Glenn Astarita, All About Jazz**

"On their fourth release, this Boston sextet lays out a relaxing jazz set. The band's songs, often written in challenging time signatures, betray a variety of global influences -- particularly in the percussion, provided by Bertram Lehmann and Norm Bergeron, which draws subtly from Afro-cuban and Brazilian rhythms. This gives the music a complex background that, if it wasn't so laid back, would be a seething, roiling mass of energy. Carl Clements (saxophone/flute) and Eric Johnson (guitar) dominate much of the melodic content, and as such tend to have the most significant solos. Clements' style harkens back to early jazz by emphasizing the melodic variation of the piece's central theme rather than using it as a starting point to be abandoned. This results in spare yet friendly runs. Johnson provides a pleasant contrast to Clements soothing style by offering more adventurous solo turns. With a clean, precise sound, Johnson's fretwork is similar to Pat Metheny's, albeit without all the toys. Like Metheny, Johnson fills the music with reassuring, confident melodies.

The music is fleshed out by the other members of the rhythm section, Ben Cook (piano/keyboards) and Joshua Davis (bass). Cook often hovers in the background, using his instrument more to accentuate than to articulate. One notable exception is a cover of Crosby, Stills and Nash's "Guinnevere", in which Cook provides a moving duet with Clements' tenor saxophone while the rest of the group slowly introduces the main melody of the original. This track also gives Davis a chance to shine by highlighting his artfully bowed bass.

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... the band can cut loose, and does so on "Stop & Go". Here, Clements' saxophone is more aggressive, invoking the bluster and brilliance of Charlie. Johnson also changes his approach, utilizing a dirtier, bluesier style comparable to John Scofield's work.

... Rituals displays a group with chops and vision. "

- **Ron Davies, Splendidzine**

"You hear many emotions: thoughtfulness, adventure, strength ... and innocence, so rare in music. I hear echoes of Oregon, the earliest Coryell, Zappa instrumentals, half-forgotten groups like Entourage - the first days of fusion, at its most open-minded. The moods begin with rhythm - either calm cymbals or a cluster of hand-drums - and the guitar of Eric T. Johnson, adding a number of flavors. His tone is dirty for "Intersections": round rambling notes, with a tiny hint of fuzz. The other instruments circle around him, especially Carl Clements; his sax is crying, with a wispy sort of voice. Ben Cook provides a pensive piano, and the soprano keeps climbing higher. On "North March", Clements sounds like an oboe, and he twirls beside Johnson's acoustic guitar - the sound is exactly like Oregon's. Played in a vigorous 5/4, the tune skips like a child; part of the joy is not knowing what comes next. David Crosby's "Guinnivere" reveals herself slowly: Josh Davis groans a note on bowed bass, and Clements picks it up on tenor. Cook plays a drawing-room theme; Johnson sprinkles a few notes on top. Eric and Carl then play in unison, followed by the others: it sounds to busy, but the harmonies are striking. "Stop and Go" travels a fast road (Cook calls in short bursts, like a car horn) and "Crosscurrent" pairs Davis' bow and Johnson's undulating strings - an endless stream, but many rivulets. Sit back, and hear the music flow by.

Clements' flute whistles through the waltz of "Mirrormere", a happy thought vigorously exercised. While the piano and brushes treat it as a salon piece, Carl does not; he chirps with power, letting all share in his joy. "Seven of Mine" takes one of the rarest time signatures, 7/4, and works it into a natural-sounding near-rondo. Cook's fluttering theme is varied by the others, a caucus race without an end. Honors go to the ever-changing percussion; Davis' string-snapping solo is his best. The twelve-minute "Ritual" starts with more of that good bass, and becomes an Eastern meditation with wooden flute and ethereal keys. Drums slowly intrude, and the flute toughens its sound - still the peace remains. And the disc closes with formality: "Now the Day Is Gone", played by Carl with sweetness, joined by the band on the second chorus. Josh's bow is welcome, and Eric adds some beautiful twinkles - so perfect in its conception, so sad that it has to end. While it is their third album, this is my first encounter with Crosscurrent. I hope it is not my last. "

- **John Barrett, Jazz USA**