

## Luca Nostro Quintet *Are You OK?*

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JANDO MUSIC

★★★★★

On *Are You OK?*, Italian guitarist Luca Nostro poses a question prog-rock-flavored jazz has asked since its inception: Where's the sweet spot for instrumentalists working at amped-up volumes? The title

track attempts an answer. The guitarist plays one fuzzed-out lick after another, pianist John Escreet comps with Fender Rhodes overtones on high, tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin joins the fray, bassist Joe Sanders adds some bottom and Tyshawn Sorey strikes up a roiling storm.

A composer touched by Frank Zappa's inquiring angularity, Nostro works closely with his energetic band on nine tracks that have a suite-like quality. The context for his songs is not disclosed, but there's no mistaking the grip of the group as a unit. McCaslin is particularly garrulous, steely and imaginative. Sanders is supple and subtle on his upright bass, and Sorey excels at being supportive and propulsive. —Howard Mandel

**Are You OK?:** Are You OK?; ... No; Trematoda; My Dear Fears Intro; My Dear Fears; Wane Lèn Ma Yone Bi; Reverse Cone In Spite Of A Square Woman; I Had To Hurt You For No Reason; I Hate. (57:33)

**Personnel:** Luca Nostro, guitar; Donny McCaslin, tenor saxophone; John Escreet, Fender Rhodes, piano; Joe Sanders, bass; Tyshawn Sorey, drums.



## GLOBE UNITY: FRANCE



*Traces*  
**Claude Tchamitchian Sextet (Emouvance)**  
*Tournesol*  
**Julien Desprez/Benjamin Duboc/Julien Loutelier (Dark Tree)**  
*Inspired*  
**Yves Robert Trio (BMC Records)**  
 by Tom Greenland

France once provided a new home for expatriate American musicians seeking refuge from racism, later spawning many fine artists of its own. Today, jazz is no longer a foreign 'tongue' there, as many French musicians 'speak' it with indigenous authority.

Armenian-French bassist Claude Tchamitchian was first inspired to embrace his cultural roots when he studied under André Jaume at the Avignon conservatory. *Traces*, a sextet offering with vocalist Geraldine Keller, saxophonists Daniel Erdmann and François Corneloup, guitarist Philippe Deschepper and drummer Christophe Marguet, was inspired by *Seuils*, Lebanese-Armenian novelist Krikor Beledian's memoir of the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide. Like the rediscovered family photos described in his book, each composition is organized around an image of a fictional character or place, fleshed out by vivid spoken word/sung interpretations of Beledian's prose (translated into French). Much of the music has a low tonal center, anchored by Corneloup's baritone horn and bowed bass, the melodies reminiscent of Anatolian folk sources, the rhythms, often in odd meters, full-throttle rock.

*Tournesol*, a short trio set recorded in Paris, takes avant minimalism to an extreme, blending the tones of guitarist Julien Desprez, bassist Benjamin Duboc and percussionist Julien Loutelier into an opaque electro-acoustic soundscape. Like a stagnant pond, the calm surface of the music belies the teeming organic life contained beneath. None of the instruments are recognizable by their signature sounds; rubbed pots and metallophones; digital loopers; bowed percussion; subdued attacks; swelling overtones; and heavy reverberation all add to the thick veil of sound. The result is like watching a movie blindfolded: the soundtrack is there, but the listener is forced to imagine the plot, characters and mise-en-scène.

On *Inspired*, trombonist Yves Robert leads a trio with bassist Bruno Chevillon (like Tchamitchian, a former student of André Jaume) and drummer Cyril Atef, recorded live at Budapest's Opus Jazz Club. Robert and Chevillon bring impeccable tone, touch and technique while Atef adds world-beat bounce and exuberant vocals, resulting in intelligent, adventurous music with a danceable groove. Chevillon's incisive plucks, slaps and harmonics, together with Atef's lively feel on assorted percussion instruments (hand drums, cuíca, shakers), often looped electronically, provide the rhythmic bedrock for Robert's expressive tone, which might ring high like a trumpet, slur across a fast passage, yowl like a cat or chatter through a mute. Especially compelling moments occur on "Bien dans sa Peau", "Ideas through Running" and "Cahutchuca", when the trio collectively accelerates and decelerates over prolonged passages.

For more information, visit [emouvance.com](http://emouvance.com), [darktree-records.com](http://darktree-records.com) and [bmcrecords.hu](http://bmcrecords.hu)



*Criss Cross*  
**Florian Weber/Donny McCaslin/Dan Weiss (Enja)**  
*Are You OK?*  
**Luca Nostro Quintet (Jando Music)**  
*City of Poets*  
**Jason Palmer/Cedric Hanriot (Whirlwind)**  
 by Tom Greenland

Note to jazz artists: if you're going to invite tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin to your recording session, get ready for a sideman who plays like a leader. Three recent projects show how his charismatic presence manifests across a variety of settings.

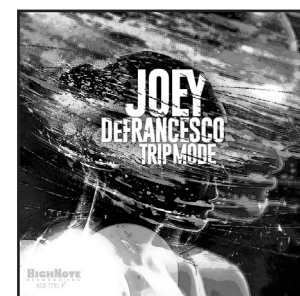
Florian Weber has a unique approach to keyboard, often splitting his hands between acoustic and electric pianos, playing at times as if possessed by multiple sonic personalities. For *Criss Cross*, a trio release fêting the music of Thelonious Monk and Bill Evans, he reenlists drummer Dan Weiss (from an earlier trio) and McCaslin, a bassless format heightening possibilities for spontaneous inventions, or what Weber refers to as "polyphonic intuition". McCaslin has ample room here to expound and expand while Weber is a forceful yet empathetic counterweight, especially on "Time Remembered", "Four in One" and "Spring Is Here", where multilateral exchanges abound. On hard-grooving tunes like "T.T.T.T." (aka "Twelve-tone Tune Two") and "Evidence", McCaslin cogently displays his creative mettle: effortlessly pushing and pulling against the funky 23-beat rhythm on the former; spinning out long-arcing serpentine phrases laced with side-slipping ornaments and snappy endings ranging from low burbles to high hoarse cries on the latter. And though he has many tasteful, understated moments, most of his solos, no matter how slowly they begin, eventually ramp up to a level of adventure and ebullience that never ceases to amaze and satisfy.

Guitarist Luca Nostro, a high-concept composer/improviser from Rome, recorded his fourth album, *Are You OK?*, in Brooklyn with McCaslin, keyboard player John Escreet, bassist Joe Sanders and drummer Tyshawn Sorey. His music combines quirky melodies and rhythmic structures with a rock attitude to produce a style at once challenging and accessible. McCaslin's dynamic playing, often spurred by Escreet's comping on Fender Rhodes and Sorey's formidable beats and creative accent patterns, is a powerful asset to this project. On "...No" he slowly but steadily builds a riff into a solo of epic proportions; on "Trematoda" he achieves a similar effect, accelerating and decelerating his rhythmic momentum within a single line or phrase. He soars without a safety net over the blues-inflected groove of "My Dear Fears" and sculpts majestic musical figures on "I Had to Hurt You for No Reason", which acquire sharp details within their broader gestures, expansive contours often landing on sharp pinpoints. Nostro and Escreet have much of their own to add, making this album a balanced team effort.

For their joint project, *City of Poets*, U.S. trumpeter Jason Palmer and French pianist Cédric Hanriot drew inspiration from two sources: Dan Simmons' *Hyperion Cantos* science fiction novels (themselves based on Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*) and Olivier Messiaen's seven "modes of limited transposition", a series of scales/modes, which, by nature of their inherent symmetry, lack a definitive tonic or 'home' pitch. Recorded live at Pizza Express Jazz Club in London with McCaslin, bassist Michael Janisch and drummer Clarence Penn, the quintet's sound harkens back to the heyday of hardbop, with bluesy, swinging beats and ebullient solos—only these guys demonstrate just how high the bar for improvisational vocabulary has been raised over the intervening years. McCaslin, for

example, is not a player known for certain signature riffs; instead, he can effortlessly take any idea that pops into his head (or was popped there by an accompanying musician) and then transmogrify it into something larger, working it, warping it, without compromising its essence—inventing form, without a formula. You can hear this happening on "The Poet's Tale" or "The Consul's Tale", where his arsenal of trills, bends, slides and other ornaments never occludes broader logic. Palmer, a sunny player with a warm, expressive tone given to vocal effects, and Hanriot, a swinging stylist who can keep several ideas afloat at once, make notable contributions as well, moving the hardbop ethos into present times.

For more information, visit [jazzrecords.com/enja](http://jazzrecords.com/enja), [jandomusic.com](http://jandomusic.com) and [whirlwindrecordings.com](http://whirlwindrecordings.com). Donny McCaslin is at Prospect Park Bandshell Aug. 10th as part of *BRIC Celebrate Brooklyn and Tompkins Square Park Aug. 28th as part of SummerStage/Charlie Parker Jazz Festival*. See Calendar.



*Trip Mode*  
**Joey DeFrancesco (HighNote)**  
 by Alex Henderson

Like many of the retro-minded Young Lions of Generation X who emerged in the '80s, organ player Joey DeFrancesco is a throwback to the hard-swinging East Coast jazz of the '50s and '60s, closely identified with the Jimmy Smith/Jack McDuff/Charles Earland tradition. DeFrancesco, whose father is fellow organ player Papa John DeFrancesco, is quite capable of venturing beyond that tradition, however, and *Trip Mode* demonstrates that it is a mistake to pigeonhole the 45-year-old Philadelphian.

DeFrancesco's tunes dominate *Trip Mode*, which finds him joined by bassist Mike Boone, guitarist Dan Wilson and drummer Jason Brown. The only songs DeFrancesco didn't write are Wilson's energetic "Who Shot John" and the Ray Noble standard "The Touch of Your Lips". On the latter, DeFrancesco provides some romantic and pleasant enough vocals, featuring the heavy Sinatra influence he has shown in the past.

Compositionally, DeFrancesco is far from predictable. Gritty, infectious soul-jazz grooves like "Traffic Jam" and slow blues "Cuz U No" are very much in the Smith/McDuff vein, but the title track is an angular postbop number that would not have been out of place on one of Larry Young's late '60s Blue Note albums. DeFrancesco also plays acoustic piano ("Arizona Sunrise", "On Georgian Bay" and "The Touch of Your Lips"), electric keyboards and even features his trumpet on four selections: "The Touch of Your Lips", funky "What's Your Organ Player's Name?", pensive "On Georgian Bay" and ballad "Arizona Sunrise".

Wilson, Boone and Brown all deserve credit for their flexibility; DeFrancesco gives his sidemen a variety of material to work with and they rise to the occasion. The fact that he moves from instrument to instrument (often on the same song) as much as he does no doubt kept the sidemen on their toes in the studio. DeFrancesco is excellent no matter what he is playing and his willingness to try different things yields unpredictable results on *Trip Mode*.

For more information, visit [jazzdepot.com](http://jazzdepot.com). DeFrancesco is at Dizzy's Club Aug. 11th-14th. See Calendar.