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## JOE DEROSE **PRESS QUOTES**

### **JoeDeRose and Amici “Peace Streets” by George Harris (JazzWeekly)**

Don't tell drummer Joe DeRose that “fusion” or “jazz-rock,” as it used to be called, is a long lost genre. What was ubiquitous back in the 70s is as rare as blonds in a Greek Orthodox Church service, but DeRose brings it back, and with an enjoyable vengeance. He teams up with Hristo Vitchev/g, Dann Zinn/sax, Murray Low/keys and Dan Robbins/b for a dozen originals that bring out the best of this style, namely uptempo energy, and leaves behind the weaknesses, namely self-indulgent chops, to create quite an enjoyable session.

DeRose's kinetic and active drumming keep all of the tunes livened up, such as the uptempo'd groove on “Just About 8” and the jamming title track, while “New Frontiers” is hard hitting, but not overbearing. Zinn's tenor is warm and rich, and doesn't go into histrionics; instead he keeps the feel contemporary and euphonic as on the rock steady “So It Is.” Vitchev, better known for his acoustic sound on his own discs, sounds comfy and at home while plugged in, showing some impressive work on the lilting “After the Storm” with keyboardist Low, or going back and forth with Zinn, and then ratcheting it up together on the enjoyable wrestling match “In a Moment's Time.” The work between DeRose and Robbins is like the teamwork on a three legged race, with them able to swerve left and right without tripping over each other. Lots of uptempo and uplifting moments here. Give it a chance!

### **JoeDeRose and Amici “Peace Streets” by Brent Black (Critical Jazz)**

Remember fusion? Joe De Rose and Amici take old school fusion and move it into the next millennium with Peace Streets. Sounds like? Take the Chick Corea Elektrik Band and add a more intense rock oriented energy and you may be getting dangerously close to what may well be the sound that fusion purists have been looking for. The lineup is first rate including premier saxophonist Dann Zinn and a rhythm section that can is as tight as the come in Murray Low on keys and Dan Robbins on bass. Critically acclaimed and Grammy nominated Hristo Vitchev turns in perhaps his finest playing to date as he peels back another layer of his amazing talent to reveal a hard rock edge that one might compare to an amped up Mike Stern. Joe De Rose swings like a beast, a lyrical drummer with the intensity of a Billy Cobham and the deft touch of a Max Roach. The harmonious synergy captured here is mind blowing.

There is a distinct uniformity in presentation, a lyrical cohesion of conversation as the ensemble members expand on the improvisational course set out by the previous soloist. The retro groove sound of Low provides a deceptively subtle counterpoint throughout while Zinn and Vitchev ride an emotional crest of harmonic intensity, welcome to the land of rhythm and groove. "So It Is!" features some blistering work from Vitchev which is matched throughout with the intensity of saxophonist Dann Zinn. Most fusion releases focus far too much on one individual soloist and

the accompanying pyrotechnics they bring to the table not to mention the production sound as if the music has been sanitized for your protection. Peace Streets has the sound of a true working band and production qualities that are warm, slightly raw but never lacking in intensity or focus. "Native Son" is another standout composition that owes a great deal to an incredibly underrated bassist in Dan Robbins, a smoldering lyrical soul pumpkin if there ever was one.

Joe De Rose and Amici works thanks to the incredible partnership between Joe and guitarist Hristo Vitchev who are responsible for the compositions. The rhythm section has bought into what they are selling and the results speak for themselves. I grew up on fusion, this is better. Joe De Rose and Amici get it right. This is as close to perfect as one can get!

### **JoeDeRose and Amici “Peace Streets” by Travis Rogers (JazzTimes)**

Joe DeRose and Hristo Vitchev have been musical collaborators for years. Joe was in the Hristo Vitchev Quartet with Dan Robbins (bass) and Weber Iago (keyboards) and the same line-up appeared with saxophonist Dann Zinn in Joe DeRose and Amici’s first album “Sounds for the Soul” which was released on Vitchev’s record label First Orbit Sounds.

The line-up remains the same for the second album with the exception of Murray Low taking the keyboard role. This album “Peace Streets” is also on the First Orbit Sounds label and is a brilliant continuation of the sound created by this group.

That sound jumps out with full fusion energy on the very first track “New Frontiers” and, at the 1:00 mark, the piece turns lyrically without losing its energy and drive. The opening track gives a quick taste of all the band members and it is spectacular from the start.

The double-pedaling Joe DeRose maintains the efficient drive as Dann Zinn’s sax is highlighted while Dan Robbins’ bass thunders from below. Murray Low takes over with the keys for rapid-fire brilliance before Robbins gets his own solo. Finally, Hristo’s sizzling guitar sets up a drum feature full of precision and punch. From lightning to lyricism, this is a ride that requires seat belts.

As on the first Amici album, Joe DeRose and Hristo Vitchev co-wrote most of the songs. Hristo once remarked, "I usually approach writing from a harmonic perspective, then the melody. And the last thing I think about is the groove. With Joe, we'll start with the groove, and he'll start singing the melodic line. His sense of melody comes from a vocal perspective, and it's a very lyrical approach, almost like creating a pop tune."

The results are something very different from Hristo’s other albums which have been described as “Impressionistic soundscapes.” If Hristo’s other albums are like Claude Monet’s blending colors, then this is like Georges Seurat with his precise pointillism.

If familiar with the works of Hristo's quartet, then the hearer may be surprised and yet...not so. It is indeed consistent with the movement and elegance of what is heard on their quartet recordings. After all, they were all in it together with the exceptions of Low and Zinn.

"So It Is!" is the second track and is opened with Hristo's guitar which is quickly joined by Zinn's sax doubling on the melody. A Spyro Gyra vibe is created which is cool and exciting at the same time. Hristo shows himself as a completely versatile virtuoso as Joe DeRose and Dan Robbins are tight in the pocket.

The composition is brilliant and opens room for great performances by the assembled musicians. This has always been a hallmark of Hristo's writing craft--he lets the others truly explore and share.

As broad-brushed exposition on melody is found in "Native Son." While the lead instruments do get individual spotlight time, it is the corps which carries the broad theme over as the sax is most pronounced with Dann Zinn's marvelous touch. His time with Joe Henderson and Freddie Hubbard was, obviously, well-spent.

"Native Reprise" pushes him up again as Hristo's crunchy guitar swings behind. Joe and Dan Robbins get a cool swing going as Hristo shades the sax from above. The guitar is masterfully wielded in frenetic distinction to Zinn's sax. This was a fun one.

"In a Moment's Time" almost makes this band look like they are masquerading as South Florida boys. Small wonder since DeRose and Low are masters of Latin Jazz. The rhythm section is beautifully together as the melody is given firm footing from which to spring.

This is followed by "After the Storm" which contains great moments of pairing between bass and keys and then bass and guitar as the lead is traded between sax and guitar. Murray Low then gets a lead and reveals why he is so desired as a musician. Dann Zinn gets his own moments of sheer lyrical beauty in this piece and the song ends long before you are ready for it to end.

Joe Horner contributed one of the coolest bass lines ever for "Smiles for Miles." Fortunately, Horner graciously let Joe record it with Dan Robbins.

Zinn contributes beautiful intonations followed by staccato punches in accordance with that bass line funk. The track also features some of Low's most effective keyboard work. Hristo climbs high with that incredible skill of his as Joe and Dan keep the whole thing anchored with that unbelievable groove. Good Lord.

"Silent Prayer" is the second of the Hristo-only compositions and it features full-bodied harmonies on top of what can only be described as a reverent melody. The song first appeared on Hristo's album with Liubomir Krastev entitled "Rhodopa."

As I described it in my review of that album, "supplication gives way to thanksgiving" as the movement goes "from hymn to jazz and back to hymn in a progression that is wondrously

revealing of the nature of prayer and meditation.” The piece ends with the sweet fulfillment that comes from emptying oneself.

“Just About 8” is a great showcase for Dann Zinn at his melodic and lyrical best while the rhythm section is in lock-step. Great pacing and melody makes this a very enjoyable piece.

However, one amazing example of the unity exhibited by this quintet is found in “The Spirit of the Room.” Given their long history together it should not come as a surprise and Hristo himself gets deserved attention with his ascendent guitar solo. Robbins contributes a sweet, virtuosic solo, as well.

Beneath it all, DeRose establishes an Afro-Cuban groove which is situated nicely with the bass. The track features a drum solo from the bandleader himself as Hristo paints a vivid soundscape before the song closes with a hot stop. So well done. The piece is an on-point example of the vocal melody that Joe contributes.

The eleventh track is the third of Hristo’s solo compositions. He shows again his generous understanding of how to best use the musicians with him. The melody is touching and warm and the musicians respond with their own warmth and understanding.

It is an emotional piece as so many of Hristo’s works are. There is the joy of friendship and affection found here. It is a fine piece for Low’s delicate keyboard work. The slow melody of the Zinn sax is extraordinary while the tempo is like a stroll on the edge of memory.

“Peace Streets” closes the album and it is a fine and fitting end. It is always fascinating which songs are chosen to finish a CD or LP. “Peace Streets” is almost the inevitable end for this album with its summation of the preceding tracks but also with its sense of sending off the listener back into the world. The admonition is to carry the heart and spirit of Peace into the streets. The encouragement and exhortation of the work is almost like the issuing of marching orders.

The track is a work of beauty to bring down the curtain on a work of beauty. When all is finished, there is only one thing left to do...turn it on again.

### **JoeDeRose and Amici “Peace Streets” by Dick Metcalf (Improvjazzation Nation Magazine)**

My guitar-playing friend Hristo Vitchev sent this one for review.... he’s co-leader on this... Joe (drums) is (I assume) the lead... the other members are Dann Zinn on sax, Murray Low on keys & Dan Robbins on bass. In fact, I only got this posted into my queue yesterday – & that’s part of what makes this one unique – it got JUMPED right to the head of the queue... yes, it IS “that good”... as you scope out the marvelous energy and sophisticated changes on “The Spirit Of The Room“, you’ll know right NOW why this had to get a review so soon! “Smiles For Miles” had room for each player to shine – and they burn brilliantly on this tune, I’ll tell you (Hristo’s guitar lead is absolute KILLER on this one)! Of the dozen tracks offered up for your aural adventure, I

found the opener, “New Frontiers“, to be my favorite... but then, each time I listen to the CD (I’ve already listened to it 6 times this morning), I find something “new” & “refreshing”. If you’re looking for something to buy your musically “bored” friends, because they need to get “re-charged” – this comes MOST HIGHLY RECOMMENDED... it gets an “EQ” (energy quotient) rating of 5.00, which means it also gets the “PICK” of this issue for “best 21st Century fusion jazz”!

### **JoeDeRose and Amici “Peace Streets” by Grady Harp (Amazon.com)**

Amici means ‘Friends’ and few artists understand the significance of this harmony more than Joe De Rose and his partnership with Hristo Vitchev. The two giants meld in this gift to the world of small ensemble jazz. As one commentator stated, ‘Remember fusion? Joe De Rose and Amici take old school fusion and move it into the next millennium with Peace Streets. Sounds like? Take the Chick Corea Elektrik Band and add a more intense rock oriented energy and you may be getting dangerously close to what may well be the sound that fusion purists have been looking for. The lineup is first rate including premier saxophonist Dann Zinn and a rhythm section that can is as tight as the come in Murray Low on keys and Dan Robbins on bass. Critically acclaimed and Grammy nominated Hristo Vitchev turns in perhaps his finest playing to date as he peels back another layer of his amazing talent to reveal a hard rock edge that one might compare to an amped up Mike Stern. Joe De Rose swings like a beast, a lyrical drummer with the intensity of a Billy Cobham and the deft touch of a Max Roach. The harmonious synergy captured here is mind blowing.’

Try to top that after experiencing the sounds that pour forth from this excellent CD, Peace Street! In words, perhaps not, but in emotional response to the music as written, performed, and produced on this CD everyone will have a special response. Peace Streets has the sound of a true working band and production qualities that are warm, slightly raw but never lacking in intensity or focus.

All of the compositions are from the pens of De Rose and Vitchev so everything is fresh and unique. The ensemble here is Joe De Rose, Drums, Hristo Vitchev, Guitar, Dann Zinn, Saxophone, Murray Low, Keys and Dan Robbins, Bass.

### **JoeDeRose and Amici “Sounds for the Soul” by Brad Walseth (Jazz Chicago)**

We’ve heard from drummer Joe DeRose before as a member of Bulgarian-American guitarist Hristo Vitchev’s excellent Bay Area ensemble. On his first album as leader, DeRose utilizes basically the same group, while augmenting the core with saxophonist Dann Zinn. And as to be expected from a drummer - this group takes things in a slightly more combustible direction than the slightly more atmospheric sounds in Vitchev’s writing and moves into more of an uptempo fusion direction that is quite exciting. On the opening “Nick’s Legacy,” (written for his father) everyone gets into the action with outstanding solos from stellar bassist Dan Robbins, Grammy-

nominated pianist Weber Iago, Zinn and Vitchev on a fiery electric guitar over explosive drumming by DeRose. DeRose explains that "Amici" means friends in Italian, and many of the songs are dedicated to people (like Louie Bellson on "Drum Angel") who helped him along the way. He also thanks his fellow musicians for their input and it is clear that these musicians truly enjoy working with each other. Most of the songs were cowritten with Vitchev and his keen ear for warm harmonization is a solid presence. Saxophonist Zinn is also a welcome addition - often taking the lead on the themes - freeing Vitchev to and bringing the music into new dimensions sonically. Songs like "The Skies Below," "Bros At Play" and "Ancient Prayer" navigate the area between the melodic and the rhythmic with abandon. There is an urgent undercurrent of energy barely restrained from breaking out at any time and this tension results in some enthralling music. Even the beautiful "Tears from Tokyo" refuses to sink into slumber, while the catchy title track is the "hit" and offers great solos, especially from Robbins. The Iago-cowritten "Miracles" ends this wonderful recording - finally succumbing to take a breath and chill out a bit.

### **JoeDeRose and Amici "Sounds for the Soul" by Brent Black (Critical Jazz)**

Remember fusion? Remember back in the day when bands such as Return To Forever and Weather Report embraced the original idea of a jazz collective, a collaborative effort where the chain was only as strong as the weakest link and each co-conspirator had their own lyrical story to tell? Welcome Joe De Rose and Amici.

Few critics go deep catalog unless the release in question is a major re-issue. The critical life is far more than the excitement of the new release for it is the history of the band that can lead to a far greater understanding of the lyrical sense of purpose they have established over time. This 2010 release is well worth the effort as it embraces the original intent of the great fusion bands from the 70's and early 80's with color sounds from a more contemporary riff on just where their harmonic soul can be found. A perfect storm of intensity, texture and flavor. Drummer Joe De Rose has been flying under the radar for far too long. Part Jeff Watts and part Dave Weckl, Joe De Rose sets his own groove as a lyrical drummer that does far more than sit comfortably in the pocket. De Rose is the organic pulse and rhythmic soul of an ensemble that has quietly taken on the task releasing more traditional fusion from the jazz witness protection program and then adding a new cool riff to embrace the more contemporary sound of today. Amazing work if you can pull it off, they do!

The collective here includes critically acclaimed guitarist Hristo Vitchev and his long time running mate Weber Iago, a brilliant pianist with a deft touch and deep melodic soul. Dan Zinn is as good as they come on saxophone and Dan Robbins may well be the most under rated bassist on the planet. So why does Sounds For The Soul work? Just that, these tunes come from the soul and embrace the people most important and influential in the personal and professional development of Joe De Rose. De Rose and Hristo Vitchev team up for a reinvented fusion approach that combines the excitement and edge of the more rock oriented approach of thirty years ago with the modernistic approach of the contemporary fusion of today. Old school fusion made new cool fusion. None better!

## **JoeDeRose and Amici “Sounds for the Soul” by Ian Mann (The Jazz Mann)**

Joe De Rose is an American drummer, composer and educator based in his home town of San Jose, California. He studied at the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston before returning home and first came to my attention as a member of guitarist Hristo Vitchev's Quartet. The Vitchev quartet's excellent album “Song For Messambria” is reviewed elsewhere on this site.

De Rose comes from a large Italian American family and the name of his band, Amici, is literally Italian for “Friends”. It's an appropriate choice, Rose brings together his three colleagues from the Vitchev group, Vitchev himself on guitar, Weber Iago on piano and Dan Robbins on bass with saxophonist Dann Zinn expanding the group to a quintet. The majority of the tunes are co-written by De Rose and Vitchev but to these ears the music is less distinctive than that on “Song For Messambria”. On his own album Vitchev brought some of the folk influences of his native Bulgaria to the proceedings, De Rose favours a more orthodox but less characterful fusion sound that has its roots in the 70's and 80's and clearly references some of his early influences. De Rose's notes acknowledge John Coltrane and Louie Bellson but I also hear echoes of CTI style fusion, Steely Dan, Pat Metheny, Return To Forever and others.

Not that “Sounds For The Soul” is a bad album. Once the listener has got past the gushingly sincere credits/liner notes there's still plenty of good music to be heard. The playing is of the characteristically high technical standard we have come to expect from these musicians but over the course of an album things can begin to sound a little too polished and to veer towards the bland. Also there's little variation in mood, style and pace with only the closing “Miracles” significantly deviating from a rather homogeneous group sound.

“Nick's Legacy”, a dedication to De Rose's late father, is a spirited opener, lithe and lightly funky with solos from each member of the band plus a series of drum breaks from De Rose. Zinn solos first followed by Iago on Fender Rhodes, Robbins on Jaco inspired electric bass and finally the excellent Vitchev on guitar. His ringing chords help to give the piece, and the album as a whole, some much needed character.

The next piece, “The Skies Below”, comes from the pen of Weber Iago who manages to combine a brooding quality with a certain underlying funkiness. It's an impressive piece of work with the composer again featuring on Fender Rhodes and with particularly strong contributions coming from Zinn and Vitchev.

“Tal's Dream” is a good natured tribute to Talmadge Hicks, a late friend and formative musical influence, the mood is largely celebratory with features for the nimble Robbins on electric bass, Iago on Rhodes, Vitchev on guitar and Zinn on breezy soprano. De Rose propels proceedings authoritatively from the back.

“Bros At Play” is an amiable groove orientated work out dedicated to De Rose's elder brothers, one of whom, Gino, is a fellow drummer. Solos come from Iago at the Rhodes, Vitchev on rock flavoured guitar and Zinn on sinuous soprano.

The lengthy “Ancient Prayer” which weighs in at just under the ten minute mark is a solo composition from Vitchev. A hard driving, twisting and turning fusion epic the piece boasts Zinn’s most expansive solo thus far, this time on tenor, plus lengthy excursions from Iago on electric piano and Vitchev on soaring guitar. The soloists are propelled by De Rose’s muscular drumming in an impressive display of sticks-manship.

De Rose dedicates “Drum Angel” to one of his percussion heroes, the late great Louie Bellson. Also of Italian descent Bellson was an inspiration and role model to the young De Rose and this affectionate but powerful tribute is crowned with a series of drum breaks alongside features for Iago and Zinn.

“Tears From Tokyo”, dedicated to De Rose’s mother is thus far the nearest the album gets to a ballad. The melody was conceived when De Rose felt homesick during a Japanese tour with the Hristo Vitchev quartet. On returning to the US the pair refined and developed the tune, the first to be written for this album. This delightfully melodic piece still retains a subtle funk backbone and includes solos from Iago on Rhodes, Vitchev on guitar and Robbins on singing, high register electric bass.

De Rose offers no observations on the title track, a punchy, grooving offering that gives solo opportunities to each member of the band (Zinn, Iago, Vitchev and Robbins) as De Rose keeps the pot bubbling.

The closing “Miracles”, co-written with Iago offers something very different to that which has gone before. A sumptuous and uplifting ballad it features Iago on acoustic piano instead of the ubiquitous Rhodes and also shows De Rose’s talents as a colourist- as opposed to being the driver of the band. Zinn’s playing is appropriately tender and both Robbins and Vitchev are suitably lyrical as the album signs off in valedictory style.

“Sounds For The Soul” has much to commend it. The playing from all five members of the Amici group is excellent throughout with Vitchev arguably the most distinctive soloist. Although the writing is less distinguished than on Vitchev’s own record he and De Rose (and to a lesser extent Iago) have still come up with some strong themes and melodic ideas. Invariably this style of music can sound a little too smooth when committed to disc but one suspects that De Rose’s Amici group is an altogether more exciting prospect when encountered live- as so many so called fusion outfits are.