

Jacob Szekely Trio

“This is the first time that I have heard a cellist make a convincing case as a soloist in a modern jazz context,” says Eugene Friesen, Grammy Award winning cellist and Berklee professor. In his first outing as a leader, Jacob Szekely has created an album that is truly revolutionary, definitively expanding the sonic culture of the cello into the world of Contemporary Jazz.

With influences that range from classical/jazz/funk/rock and even Indian, the music is highly complex, rhythmically and harmonically, while always grooving and with an unfailing sense of melody.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Szekely began his studies at age 3; he grew up in a musical family where his talent was recognized early on. The family moved to Lexington, Kentucky, where fiddling and bluegrass music were in the air, and by the age of 13 Szekely expanded his listening to rock and Jazz. “It took me a while to realize that I could improvise and play in different styles on the cello,” says Szekely, “I always knew that the sound of the cello was my voice, but there just wasn’t a template for that.” The results of this search have led to his unique approach. Noted Jazz Critic Brian Arsenault in the International review of Music:

“The cello in Szekely’s special hands is transformative, literally. At times a guitar, a bass guitar, a violin, a harp. But always, always a cello. Is there anyone else in the world who plays the instrument like this?”

Jacob explains the genesis of the trio: “As a studio musician and sideman here in Los Angeles, I’ve spent so much of my professional life trying to sound like other musicians, and in a way trying to prove what my instrument was capable of... I finally decided the time had come to ask myself who I am and what I really sound like, and then spent a year digging really deep, trying to figure that out.”

This year long path of discovery led to a complete reimagining of the possibilities of the instrument for Szekely, from the compositions, to the development of a real improvisational language on the cello, to the unique sound Jacob Szekely Trio itself.

“Drums and piano take up a lot of sonic space, which meant I needed to start with musicians who were sensitive, and dynamic,” Says Szekely. He enlisted two of Los Angeles’ top studio artists, pianist/keyboardist Josh Nelson and drummer Christopher Allis. “Playing with Josh and Christopher has been a dream come true for me,” Szekely says. The trio’s textured, often electric sound, recalls such contemporary groups as the *Flexible Trio*, or *Chris Potter’s Underground*. “To me, the Rhoads and Moog are great colors, and compliment the cello in ways the piano can’t,” Szekely explains. “The Rhoads is so expressive, and yet has a lightness that doesn’t compete with the cello.”

Most of the tracks on the album were recorded in a single day; Jacob was insistent, in the manner of his Jazz predecessors, that the first take was what was going to print. “The music that attracts me has a sense of risk-taking. I think the way we recorded this album helped us capture that. Even while I was growing up, the classical records I enjoyed, like the really old recordings of Pablo Cassals and Artur Schumsky, had a this incredible humanity and vulnerability, even in their imperfections. I’m a high-risk player, and to me that’s really necessary when you’re trying to do something new as an artist.”

The Album begins with **300 years**, a soulful meditation on time and the infinite. The track is an excellent example of Szekely’s style, which tends to favor the through-composition and an over-arching narrative structure of classical music, combined with contemporary jazz harmony and syncopated grooves, often in mixed meters. In a similar fashion, the enigmatic **Morning Rush** touches on elements of jazz, metal, Indian, (listen to Jacob’s dramatic solo,) and culminates in a fugue contrapuntally blending all the previous themes of the piece.

“Along with some of my great mentors, my biggest inspiration as an artist is my wife,” says Szekely. “Diana and I met shortly before I lost a close friend to a drunk driving accident, a very dark time in my life, and it was around that time I heard the song **Dig**. More than the melody or harmony of the tune, it was the lyrical refrain that really stuck with me:

If I turn into another, dig me out from under what is covering the better part of me. Sing this song; remind me that we’ll always have each other, when everything else is gone.

“Those lyrics haunted me throughout the loss of my friend, and the gaining someone who would eventually become my wife.” In Szekely’s capable hands, **Dig** is completely transfigured into a music that is deeply complex and highly personal, yet emotionally authentic and accessible at its core. Beneath a soaring cello solo, the original harmony of the song returns only at the end of Szekely’s arrangement, bringing the listener to an triumphant climax.

Szekely’s wife also gets her name in the track listing. **Diana’s Lullaby** is the only solo piece on the record, and it features Jacob on a 5-string electric cello. “I usually write at the keyboard; this is the first composition that I’ve ever written on the cello itself.” Says Jacob: “I don’t know of any previous compositions for this instrument, and it was fun approaching the possibilities of such a blank canvas.” Living in a sound world all its own, Szekely utilizes finger-tapping and strumming, techniques borrowed from the electric bass lexicon, bringing them to new life on the cello.

The album comes to its conclusion with **Postlude:Houston**. “This past year I had the honor of touring with Rush in Europe and North America,” Szekely explains. “They taught me so much about what it means to be a professional, and to be dedicated to your craft. Being a musician can be so bitter-sweet: you meet all these amazing people and fall in love with them, knowing that it’s all so finite. Postlude was written in my hotel room in Houston, on the last day of the tour, and it’s meant to capture the melancholy and sadness of saying goodbye.”

“Jacob has produced an emotive, innovative and thoroughly modern fusion of musical styles ... A strikingly original virtuoso cello statement.... Beautifully performed and uniquely arranged.” – Geddy Lee.