

# Josh Nelson- Press

## **ALL ABOUT JAZZ- October 2007**

**Josh Nelson**

**Let It Go**

**Native Language**

By George W. Harris

Pianist composer Josh Nelson has put out an engaging and well diversified disc, featuring some intriguing originals, and creative interpretations of a few familiar tunes. With a touch similar to the Brad Mehldau/Wynton Kelly school of ivory, Nelson makes songs like the trio "Loose End" take a few quirky turns, just often enough to keep the listeners ears perked for the next hairpin. Featuring an all star supporting cast in Darek "Oles" (b) Matt Wilson (dr) and Anthony Wilson (g), Nelson can create a composition like Brian Wilson's "God Only Knows", throw in some sumptuous strings and sax (by Seamus Blake) and come up with a piece that is both innovative yet logical. The title tune has a progressive rock groove to it, with an energetic, uplifting vibe, with more twists than a licorice whip. Guest vocalist Sarah Gazarek adds her sweet and charming bohemian voice to the thoughtful "Leaving Here", which also features Anthony Wilson's always impeccable guitar work. The entire disc is full of wondrous ideas, expertly delivered. Stimulating and fresh; this is the work of a man who could easily represent the future of jazz.

## **Josh Nelson @ The Vic 08.23.07**

By George W. Harris

Performing in support of his brilliant new release, pianist/composer Josh Nelson showed that he has all of the markings of being a major factor in the modern jazz scene. Disarmingly engaging between songs, he is altogether visionary in his mixture of catchy melodies and creative improvisations, as he lead his all star band through an impressive opening show.

Each song presented this evening had it's own unique character, usually through the number of musicians performing on stage. Supported by the indefatigable combination of bassist Darek "Oles" and drummer Matt Wilson, Nelson delivered intriguing and complex pieces like "Loose End" with hard-hitting interplay. With guitarist Mike Scott joining the fray, the band was able to shift moods and motifs on "Introspection on 401" with more plot twists than a season of "24". Sara Gazarek then climbed aboard with her sweet and joyful voice to add a folksy and bohemian element on the enticing "Leaving Here." Throwing in the kitchen sink at the end, record producer Erik Kertes literally sat in on stage with his glockenspiel to plunge into the rocking, perky and catchy "Let It Go", ending the evening on a creative high note rarely seen anymore in this day. Keep an eye on Nelson, and look out for his next time around.

**JOSH NELSON/Let It Go: Young lion jazz piano man Nelson sheds the Bill Evans vibe of his past and feels confident leading in the company of Matt Wilson, Anthony Wilson and other like chopped hitters, acquitting himself properly as a leader and composer. Currently honing his considerable chops to more of a razor edge with a rigorous and diverse work routine, this is quite a seasoned second outing. Mixing the influences of his environment, there is a nice cascade of contemporary moves running throughout his work keeping your ears on the edge of their seat as he stays one step ahead. Tasty, well conceived stuff that hits the target.**

**969 (Native Language)**

Volume 30/Number 321

September 17, 2007

MIDWEST RECORD

CHRIS SPECTOR, Editor and Publisher

## **Josh Nelson (Native Language) 'Let It Go'**

Josh Nelson not only has good skills as a pianist, he has good friends. "Let It Go" shows both. The pianist sometimes works in a trio setting, where he is backed by drummer Matt Wilson and bassist Derek "Oles" Oleszkiewicz, two players rising in the jazz world. When he goes to a larger form, he gets the help of saxophonist Seamus Blake, guitarist Anthony Wilson and singer Sara Gazarek. But he also does one duet with Blake and is joined by a string quartet on two songs. All of that creates an album that changes sounds and attitude greatly. Most of the pieces have a sense of West Coast cool with a 21st-century flair. The pianist has written six of the 10 songs and, on all the tracks, provides excellent melodic statements and improvisation. "Leaving Home," with Gazarek, Wilson and the string quartet, would seem to be busy in its big cast. Yet, it never gets too bulky, giving Nelson, the guitarist and the singer plenty of room to stand out. Sometimes, his songs have an almost-classical feel in melody, but he never lets that block their looseness. -- Bob Karlovits, Pittsburgh Live, Sunday, September 30, 2007  
([http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/living/music/s\\_530082.html](http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/living/music/s_530082.html))

### **Josh Nelson- "Let It Go"**

At twenty-eight years of age, jazz pianist Josh Nelson is a comer on the scene with already a lot of skins on the wall (Louis Armstrong Award, John Phillip Sousa Award, semi-finalist in Thelonius Monk Piano Competition). He brings a love for film scores and pop-rock into his jazz, as well as the influence of contemporaries like Brad Mehldau and Kurt Rosenwinkel.

Nelson is a fine if not very distinctive piano player, but the real draw in this CD comes from his compositions and his utilization of his band to interpret them well. He shows a lot of depth and lyricism in his self-penned songs this early in his career. I like the spiritual, contemplative waltz "Introspection On 401" most of all. Combined with Seamus Blake's sax I thought I was listening to a Kenny Garrett song at first. "Leaving Here" highlights Nelson's lyric-writing abilities as well as the warm vocal talents of Sara Gazarek. Of the handful of covers on the album, the Beach Boys' "Tears In The Morning" stands out most of all for it's soulful rendering. The title cut ends the record on a The Bad Plus vibe.- Written by 'Pico', October 09, 2007

<http://blogcritics.org/archives/2007/10/09/101445.php>

LA Times Critic's Choice- Calendar Section, August 19, 2007

### **JOSH NELSON (RECOMMENDED)**

Pianist and composer Josh Nelson is living testimony to the fact that fine jazz talents are not only being born in Los Angeles, they're also choosing to build lives and careers in the Southland. At 28, Nelson's resume reaches from gigs with the likes of Anthony Wilson, Ernie Watts, Jack Sheldon, and Peter Erskine to his skillful accompaniments for singers such as rising jazz star Sara Gazarek. A pair of shows at the Vic and Steamers celebrate the release of his latest CED, "Let It Go," featuring Gazarek's vocalizing and the sturdy backing of saxophonist Ben Wendel, drummer Matt Wilson, bassist Darek Oles, and guitarist Mike Scott.

## Jazz Critic's Choice

If you've been paying attention to local jazz for the past couple of years, pianist Josh Nelson has shown up on your radar, as accompanist to singers like Sara Gazarek and band pianist for any number of ensembles. Nelson celebrates his new debut recording *Let It Go (Native Language)* as a leader at the Vic on Thursday. Nelson has abundant classical chops and a beautiful touch. He's on his way to becoming one of our important keyboardists - if we can keep him. -Kirk Silsbee, *City Beat*

<http://www.lacitybeat.com/article.php?id=6026&IssueNum=220>

August 23-29, 2007

## Record review: Josh Nelson, "Let It Go" (Native Language) by Greg Burke of metaljazz.com

Just another guy tryin' to maintain L.A.'s bad reputation for attractive, intelligent jazz, pianist Josh Nelson brings a second album that will frustrate nasty old bastards who want to find things wrong with it.

Nelson has collected 10 songs you ought to call songs, because they've most all got melodies that stand out, cycle and stick in the memory. Most are his own: The fuguing, nicely lopsided determination of "Loose End" makes hope a reality; the wistful "Introspection on 401" registers a complaint that only a deaf God would ignore; the European folkishness of "Deep Breaths" makes you say hooray for sadness. The most intriguing number is a canny import, sax pal Ben Wendel's ballad "Julia," whose changes overlap bass notes in harmonic combinations that upset the ears in very satisfying ways; the last verse lays out the dissonances like some kind of Jasper Johns abstract diagram for across-the-room inspection, and hmm, yeah.

Nelson also cheats by hiring a bunch of world-class musicians, who show their respect for the material by sublimating their considerable personalities into a statement of wholeness. Talking about drummer Matt Wilson, who splashes a groove like paddles in the Wabash, and bassist Darek Oles, who's about as big and fundamental as I've heard him. Anthony Wilson steps in now and then as The Essence of Guitar -- full, warm and plucking decisively. And tenor saxist Seamus Blake acts as Nelson's main

mouthpiece, articulating the themes right down in the cellular structures and turning a series of lathelike solos. (My favorite is the bourbon-soaked, behind-the-beat Dexter Gordon tribute on "Love Letters," a Victor Young-Edward Heyman stroll in the park you might know from the 1945 movie of the same name or the version in David Lynch's "Blue Velvet.")

At the piano, Nelson sits enthroned as the last of the nonpostmodernists. His piano touch is direct and even, his rhythm right on top, and his mood optimistic -- a touch of autumnal drizzle is about as gray as he gets. The kind of guy people like, in other words. When he rules the world, he'll be renowned as a benevolent dictator.

And at the beginning of the title cut, paving the road for the final cheerful march, do we hear a mellotron? Squinchy.

Pianist **Josh Nelson**'s new album *Let It Go* (Native Language) is as impressive a debut as has been heard in quite awhile. He's one of those players who seems to have everything: lots of ideas, classical technique and voicings, good arranging sense, the ability to handle different kinds of material, a keen sense of dynamics and, of course, swing. He makes a night of it at the Bakery on Tuesday. Mine the treasure.- Kirk Silsbee (LA City Beat, 10/17/07)

"Josh is that rare young musician who has not only a wealth of study and experience under his belt (all but assuring him a prominent place in jazz music), but he also possesses those rarest of musical attributes: a touch, a tone, and a "sound" that are all identifiably his own."

- **Peter Erskine, drummer**

"As for the future of jazz, I think it is secure in the hands of splendid young musicians such as Nelson...of this effort it really could be said that this album presents Josh Nelson and the Jazz Forefront."

- **Bob Agnew, L.A. Jazz Scene (excerpt from "First Stories" liner notes)**

"Josh Nelson has exploded in popularity over the past two years...he's touted by some critics as a major force in jazz in Los Angeles."

- **P. Catherine Shanks, Daily News August 14, 1999**

"It is Nelson's wide-ranging musical interests, and his desire to further explore and express those interests in future writing and performing, that makes Nelson a musician to watch in the years ahead."

- **Richard Pitnick, Coast Weekly August 19, 1999**

"As you listen, I think you will agree the we have the jazz leadership for years to come."

- **Bob Agnew, LA Jazz Scene**

L.A. JAZZ SCENE, February 2005  
Review of his record “Anticipation”

In this set of nine originals by Josh Nelson, we find his piano trio exploring themes that leave impressions long after the music has ended. The pianist wrote each piece with straight-ahead jazz uppermost in his mind, as he explores the world of swinging sensations, spontaneous improvisation, harmonic depth, and rhythmic groove. Bassist Benjamin Campbell and drummer Matt Slocum complement the pianist’s approach with cohesive support and fiery individual statements.

The album’s title track features the trio in a dreamy state that lets the imagination wander. Soothing, and rambling with flowering passion, the piece lets each artist express natural dreams, which carry a positive spirit. Nelson isn’t one to lament about life’s troubles and mull over the confused state of affairs. His music glows with an uplifting outlook that lets spontaneity flow naturally.

Guitarist Steve Cotter joins the trio for two numbers that drive with inner strength. “Man with Dreams,” a tribute to Herbie Hancock, features Cotter, violinist Ludvig Girdland and vocalist Sara Gazarek in a gentle bossa that moves forward naturally with an infectious rhythm. Nelson switches to Fender Rhodes for this one piece, creating a vivid portrait of the man who has moved jazz in a forward direction.

Bay area tenor saxophonist Dayna Stephens, who sits in with the trio on “Early Departures” and “Most Beautiful,” lends a reflective quality to the session that creates a relaxed mood. “Brazen Hussey” and “Emergence,” on the other hand, find the trio exploring with an adventurous spirit and an intense perspective. Together, the Josh Nelson Trio provides its audience with a recommended performance that offers variety, creative spirit, and a positive outlook.

**-Jim Santella**

“Anticipation”, as reviewed by writer Rob Young

***The Players:*** Benjamin Campbell ~ Bass, Matt Slocum ~ Drums, Steve Cotter ~ Guitar (tracks 2 & 4), Sara Gazarek ~ Vocals (track 4), Ludvig Girdland ~ Violin (track 4), Dayna Stephens ~ Tenor Saxophone (tracks 6 & 8) and featured artist Josh Nelson ~ Piano and Fender Rhodes (track 4). Produced by Josh Nelson for Steel Bird Music, © 2004

In the past few years I've begin to envelope the artistry that jazz pianist encompass, yeah I was a little hasty maybe too macho to appreciate the mastery offered by a plethora of jazz pianist that are merely a few keystrokes way. Now, I must redeem myself by introducing you to a fresh voice pianist Josh Nelson and his impeccable new release titled “Anticipation” his latest on Steel Bird Music. Josh's compositions are lyrically poise with an abundance of substance; he maneuvers graciously with precision across the keys without the sizzle and redundant passages that's often heard in a lot of today's music. Therefore, he brings much needed warmth and simplicity to each composition that's born on “Anticipation”.

The first few notes establishes a template set by pianist Josh Nelson early on with a track titled “Requited”, this is a snapshot what's about come throughout “Anticipation”. Josh's soloing here on the opening track is soft with emphasis soon to be placed on the trio setting that slowly adapts to an bright & uplifting swing mode with his more then sufficient sidekicks Campbell and Slocum. The door of communication remains instinctively open here as each musician exchanges their solos; now the fruits of labor have paid off with great dividends as the trio speaks with tonal gratification.

“Prospect Bay” invites you on a voyage of inspiring melodies by Nelson's travels too Chesapeake Bay, Maryland. In a quartet setting Steve Cotter stirs up a splash jazz guitar, bassist Campbell joins in with a terrific solo with bow in hand adds just the right touch. Subsequently, Josh comes aboard delivering a gorgeous and very appetizing taste of his piano magic. Josh continues to amiably navigate the piano without delving into barrios of chaos, he confidently mirrors the fingerprints of jazzmaster Bill Evans with modest dose of improvisation on the title track “Anticipation”. On the upswing Josh and his cohorts adds yet another twist of inspiring jazz to this palate of tasty music.

In the 4th spot in rotation on “Anticipation” is a tribute to jazz pianist Herbie Hancock titled “Man With Dreams”. According to the liner notes (written by Peter Erskine) this composition is in response to Hancock's “I Have A Dream” from his 1969 album titled The Prisoner. Vocalist - Sara Gazarek, bassist - Benjamin Campbell, guitarist - Steve Cotter and drummer - Matt Slocum, joins Nelson as he works the Rhodes piano on this lavish samba arrangement that was scored and dedicated to Hancock.

Drummer Matt Slocum gets busy at the beginning of “Brazen Hussy”. What's amazing is how these young cats interpret the language of jazz with such indelible pursuit without losing focus; these guys have the rapport of musicians many years their senior.

“Early Departures” is another dedication; this time to a host of folks (John Prince, John Guerin, and his aunt Suwanee Malm) that obviously holds deep sentimental value in the heart of Josh Nelson. Saxophonist Dayna Stephens in particular adds sublime level of consciousness to Nelson's compositions. For those of you that have appreciation for the undiluted tonality, you've found it here with Dayna Stephens.

Josh describes the next tune as intense “butt kickin” well not exactly those words. Yes, “Emergence”(a title from a previous album) is indeed an infectious tune, it grooves with swing and rest assured my fellow jazz lovers these young men can play! They embrace their instruments with enthusiasm using them as a vessel to speak with content that’s attractive in quality not quantity.

At the 8th spot is a dedication that expresses matters of the heart with his love interest in mind (Josh’s wife Kathy) titled “Most Beautiful”. Nelson calls sax-man Stephans back for another session this time to add texture and intimacy to this arrangement contributing his warm and sensitive voice that sketches colorful tones onto this tapestry of love. “Brave World” wraps up this remarkable session featuring Josh Nelson working the keys as he expresses the joys and simplicity of these adoring melodies and harmonies that soulfully unfolds with each note.

Discovering the original music by any artist brings sheer joy to my listening space and Josh Nelson’s “Anticipation” has certainly been a pleasurable listening experience. His accolades far exceed the norm for any 26-plus years old regardless of profession. Consider this, he’s scored compositions for “The Division” on Lifetime (TV), “Lucky” on FX and “First Daughter” a Forrest Whittaker film, apparently this youngster is making some serious noise on the West Coast. Before I go, I must convey my appreciation to players on this project for stepping up their game to assist Josh Nelson in his quest too fulfill his dream called “Anticipation”.