

Scott Henderson, Jeff Berlin, Dennis Chambers - HBC (2012)



1. *Actual Proof* [10:16] 2. *Mysterious Traveler* [06:59] 3. *Footprints* [08:46] 4. *D Flat Waltz* [11:57] 5. *The Orphan* [03:25] 6. *Sightseeing* [05:19] 7. *Wayward Son Of Devil Boy* [04:21] 8. *Threedom* [03:10] 9. *Stratus* [05:15] Musicians: Scott Henderson - guitar; Jeff Berlin - bass; Dennis Chambers - drums.

Not simply a super-group, but more like a jazz-fusion superpower as this formidable trio melds classic fusion works amid a few originals on its debut release, although the artists have crossed paths over the years. Bios and resumes would transcend the limitations of a review or analysis. So, it's the in-your-face attitude, creative impetus, and the respective musicians' gargantuan chops that account for a passionate exposition.

Guitarist Scott Henderson's enviable technique as a monumental blues-rock soloist shines on his "Wayward Son of Devil Boy," inflicting pain on his axe via some serious shedding and molding a blues-with-a-vengeance stance with blazing fills, detuned extended notes and wailing choruses. But the preponderance of the album offers an abundance of cunning insights and spins on pieces such as drummer Billy Cobham's jazz-fusion anthem "Stratus." Then again it would be a sacrilege to ignore this trend-setting classic. Here, all-universe session drummer Dennis Chambers slams the backbeat into overdrive in concert with bass great Jeff Berlin's sinuous fretless bass lines. Owing to the original recording, Henderson abides by late guitarist Tommy Bolin's tension and release buildup, and then goes off the radar with stratospheric licks, leading to the heavy metal-like finale.

Henderson morphs polytonal chord voicings to execute a translation of pianist Herbie Hancock's funkified "Actual Proof," where Berlin unleashes a mindboggling solo, awash with twirling notes and breakneck linear runs. Henderson injects some spacey electronic treatments and spatial attributes into saxophonist Wayne Shorter's title track from Weather Report's *Mysterious*

Traveler (Columbia, 1974), raising the bar with edgy and distorted crunch chords while reshaping and reconfiguring the primary theme, tinted with a rather ominous rite of passage.

HBC also integrates a pure jazz element into Shorter's "Sightseeing," offset by the artists' expressive solo spots and streaming background effects, all the while prepping for the kill towards the coda as Berlin thumps and plucks his bass strings into submission. Sure, he's all over the place, but lessons learned will dictate that he makes every note count, marked by his lyrical thematic statements and a technique to die for.

Other than the instrumentalists' technical mastery, these works' construction lend to a refreshing glimpse of the proverbial roads previously traveled. From a holistic perspective of the jazz-fusion genre, it doesn't get a whole lot better. ---Glenn Astarita, allaboutjazz.com

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