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## **Bassist/Composer Phil Palombi to release new recording “Detroit Lean” on XCAPPA Records**

When Phil Palombi set out to begin crafting the album that would ultimately become *Detroit Lean*, the Grammy-winning bassist and composer knew that he wanted to do something different this time around. On his debut, *80 East*, Palombi had deliberately created a record that, he says, “everyone would want to listen to, not just bass players.” For his followup, Palombi upped the ante, setting out to honor one of his musical heroes, the late bass innovator Scott LaFaro (1936-1961), best known for his work with piano genius Bill Evans. Palombi’s *RE: Person I Knew—A Tribute to Scott LaFaro*, marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of its subject and served as a companion piece to Palombi’s LaFaro book, *15 Solo Transcriptions*.

“With my previous recordings, actually with most of my writing, I was always trying to write music that fit into a specific style or band,” says Palombi. “With *Detroit Lean*, I just wrote music stream-of-consciousness style—whatever popped into my mind. As a result, I think that I unconsciously channeled a wide range of influences and sounds that have been bouncing around in my head over my musical life. I didn’t really care what anyone wanted to hear or about trying to fit a genre. I wanted to see what was inside of me.”

Turns out there is plenty there to savor: One listen to *Detroit Lean* confirms that Palombi has evolved measurably as a composer, musician and bandleader. Recorded at the Clubhouse Studio in beautiful, bucolic Rhinebeck, New York, with Palombi’s core trio of pianist Matthew Fries and drummer Keith Hall, with guitarist Tony Romano guesting on several tracks, the album is the result of Palombi looking both toward the past and straight ahead for inspiration. “I was feeling a little nostalgic when I wrote the music for this CD,” he says. “Most of the titles correspond to events or feelings that I had when I moved to New York City in 1997. In my previous life, growing up in Ohio, I was a total gear-head. I used to rebuild muscle cars, cruise, drag race—all the fun stuff! The phrase ‘Detroit Lean’ refers to a style of sitting behind the steering wheel, looking cool.”

Once he knew where he wanted to take the new music, Palombi set about fleshing out the concept with compositions specifically tailored to the project. “For some reason I can’t just sit down and write a song for the sake of writing a song,” he says. “I need to have a real relationship with what’s going down. Sometimes I can look into the future and pull something from there, but most of the time it’s looking back and analyzing my feelings about an event or person. Last year I was doing just that, marveling at the set of circumstances and decisions that led me to where I am now. It really is a bit miraculous, actually. When you look back, you can see maybe a handful of decisions where, had you simply changed one thing, your life could have been completely different. I think it would be fun to be able to go back in time, choose another path, then move forward to see what would happen. It’s not that I get whimsical about the past as much as thinking about the past is a kind of mental straight edge to keep me moving in the right direction.”

The 10 tracks comprising *Detroit Lean* together paint a portrait of where Phil Palombi is today, from “Beyond the Wall,” built atop the idea that “we put up personal walls around us and can accomplish much if we get past them,”

to “Standing Through Time,” inspired by an article about “how there is no flow of time, only a collection of ‘nows.’” The track “Sarah’s Theme” was written by Phil for his wife, the jazz pianist Sarah Jane Cion, and “Stay the Same” was penned by her.

“Every one of my CDs has featured a song by Sarah, and this is one of my favorite compositions by her,” Palombi says. “She even wrote lyrics for it, though I chose not to sing for what would be obvious reasons if you ever heard me sing.” Among the other tracks are “Take Both Paths,” its title a play upon poet Robert Frost’s *The Road Not Taken*, “I’ll Never Go Back to Brooklyn,” which Palombi stresses is not a putdown of the hipster-friendly NYC borough, and “Push-Pull,” a wistful love ballad that reaffirms the age-old case for opposites attracting. “The Phoenix” has great personal significance to Palombi, as it was written following the passing of his mother, while at the other extreme is “Alternate Side Parking,” about which Palombi says, “This song references the ritualistic evening hunt for a parking spot coming home from a gig at 3 a.m. The Amazon rainforest tribal effects were the idea of the mixing engineer George Petit. I think it perfectly captures the attitude that I feel when trying to find a parking spot in New York!”

With the songs written, Palombi called upon his secret weapon to help flesh out his ideas: Scott LaFaro’s own bass. Palombi had used it previously on the *RE: Person I Knew* sessions and at the Village Vanguard, the NYC landmark where the Bill Evans Trio had recorded its iconic *Sunday at the Village Vanguard* album shortly before LaFaro’s death. For *Detroit Lean* the idea was not so much to pay tribute to its one-time owner but simply to summon up the instrument’s exceptional sonic qualities once again. “For this record, I wanted to take Scotty’s bass and imagine what LaFaro might be recording in 2016 if he were still alive,” Palombi says. “What does his bass sound like in a completely modern setting? I just really like that bass! The first time I had the instrument in my hands it changed my life. I could play anything on it! Every note jumped out of the instrument, anywhere on the bass. The acoustic bass is a very physical instrument, and for the first time I felt like the instrument was invisible. All of a sudden I realized, ‘Holy crap! I need to learn a *lot* more about music now!’ Since I didn’t need to worry about what works physically, I could focus on what I can accomplish musically. Anything was possible, so I had to learn what that ‘anything’ could be! What I learned was it took more than simply playing the bass to get her to really speak again. She needed to be wheeled around the streets of New York again to fully come alive. About three months in the bass changed. It woke up! I couldn’t believe it. As a result, I feel you can really hear this instrument the way it sounded back when Scotty was recording with it in 1961.”

As important as the sound of the LaFaro bass is to the success of *Detroit Lean*, Palombi also credits his collaborators, the studio and the recording team that brought the music to life. “I wanted to make the recording its own artistic statement,” he says. “It was fun using the studio as a tool to bring out what I was hearing in my head. I strongly believe that sound matters. Imagine if Miles Davis recorded all of those great records in someone’s basement rather than the Columbia Records studio. Inside the studio, it was all about how the music was recorded.”

*Detroit Lean*: Great talents making inventive music in a world-class studio. It’s a perfect storm. And, most importantly, concludes Palombi, “I get to be me.” What could be better?

**Phil Palombi is currently available for interview.**

**For more information on Phil Palombi please visit: [www.philpalombi.com](http://www.philpalombi.com)**

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