

Gary Burton *Common Ground*

On **Gary Burton's** debut release on Mack Avenue Records, ***Common Ground***, the Grammy®-winning pioneer of the four-mallet technique of playing the vibes is not only delivering his first studio album since 2005, but is also introducing his latest band. Known as the **New Gary Burton Quartet**, the group is comprised of guitarist **Julian Lage**, bassist **Scott Colley** and drummer **Antonio Sanchez**. ***Common Ground*** features 10 tunes, including six remarkable originals by quartet members as well as two impressive numbers by pianist Vadim Neselovskyi (a former Burton band member), a gem from the Keith Jarrett songbook and an intriguing arrangement of the standard "My Funny Valentine," spotlighting Lage.

Well-known throughout his five-decade career for his quartets (beginning with his 1967 group featuring Larry Coryell, Roy Haynes and Steve Swallow), Burton is returning to the configuration for the first time since the mid-'90s. He expresses great enthusiasm for the new band's alchemy.

The quartet served as a reunion of Lage with Burton who has known the guitarist since he was a teen wunderkind and has featured him in his bands up until three years ago. (During the hiatus from working together, Burton was focusing on revisiting the 1973 chamber jazz classic *Crystal Silence* duo with Chick Corea, while Lage finished college and worked on his long-awaited debut album, *Sounding Point*.) "Julian has matured so much since I first met him 10 years ago when he was 12 years old," Burton says. "Julian has kept on growing and developing a sound of his own. He's a knock out." Lage fills the quartet guitar chair that was once held by such rising-star six-stringers as Pat Metheny, John Scofield and Kurt Rosenwinkel, among others.

"I've always liked the vibraphone-guitar sound," says Burton, whose masterful vibes glisten throughout ***Common Ground***. "It's something that I discovered when Nashville country guitarist Hank Garland invited me in the '60s to record with him. The sound of the two instruments together has an ideal timbre and coolness." For the quartet's rhythm section, Burton called Sanchez, who has played with the vibraphonist on and off in recent years. But Colley is new to Burton's employ. "Once I decided to have Antonio be a part of the group, I asked him what bass player he'd suggest, and he said Scott is the one," says Burton. "They are a terrific rhythm team."

Formed in 2010, the new quartet's first gig took place in August at the Red Sea Jazz Festival, and then took New York by storm with a weeklong, sold-out engagement at the Blue Note from October 19-24. After that, the group toured, road tested their material and entered the studio in New York for a three-day session December 4-6 to record ***Common Ground***. Longtime friends with Mack Avenue president Denny Stilwell and marketing vice president Randall Kennedy, Burton approached the label about the new band and proposed recording an album showcasing it. "They were both keenly interested," says Burton, who also serves as the album's producer. "And the band was excited. They're all talented composers and brought music to the group that really stands out."

Common Ground opens with the buoyant Neselovskyi composition "Late Night Sunrise," which Burton likes for its whimsy. "It's so melodic that it really works as the best piece to introduce the band," says Burton, who also chose for the album the pianist's "Last Snow," another lyrical beauty that "captures Vadim's Russian heritage. It has a light feel and is a fun piece to play."

Colley's contribution to the set list is the joyful "Never the Same Way," which features Lage delivering biting phrases on his guitar solo. "It's in 7/4 time, but because of the way Scott constructed the piece, it doesn't have that awkward feel that often happens with tunes in odd time signatures," says Burton. "We look into the audience and people are swinging and swaying to it,

and probably don't even realize the time signature."

Sanchez brought two tunes to the session, including the title track, which the drummer wrote specifically for the band. "It was written for me in mind," Burton says. "We worked it around, and added a section. Antonio is featured with his solo. We've been using this as a set closer." The other Sanchez piece is "Did You Get It," based on the 12-bar blues form, but with two bars added every other chorus, and is taken at breakneck speed with another drum solo. The tune also features Burton and Lage in call-and-response conversation.

Lage has two originals in the collection: "Etude" and "Banksy." The first is based on music that the guitarist was thinking of using as a study piece for his students. "Julian visited me in Florida to work on material for the album, and he played me this," Burton says. "I loved it, so we figured out an arrangement so we could improvise on it. It's an impressive piece that's fast and difficult. I really had to practice to get it right." The second is another complex, almost mysterious piece with displaced rhythms in the bass part and a loping rhythm at the beginning. The title of the song is based on the name of the famous British graffiti artist. "I asked Julian why he chose the title," says Burton, "and he responded that it just sounded like a cool name."

Burton brings to the date the moving ballad "Was It So Long Ago?" He says, "I don't write tunes that often. But I sat down at the piano and came up with a tango that I dedicated to Astor Piazzolla who I collaborated with in the '80s. And I knew how authentically Julian can play a tango from when he was in my 2004 *Generations* band."

Burton decided to take on the golden standard "My Funny Valentine," which he figures he's covered with different arrangements four times throughout the course of his career. He was on the fence about recording it again. "It's really a showcase for Julian who has an extended, gorgeous solo section that opens the piece," Burton says. "As it turns out, this tune brings the house down when we play it live, so I figured we had to include what has become one of the new quartet's signature tunes."

Common Ground ends with the quartet's sublime rendition of Jarrett's "In Your Quiet Place," a tune that the pianist wrote for the vibraphonist back in 1970 when they first met and played together. Back then, they recorded an album of Jarrett compositions, titled simply *Gary Burton & Keith Jarrett*. Burton says, "I've played this ballad as a solo in concerts over the years, which has worked well, but this new version is the first time it's been played in a band format since 1970."

While Burton has crossed multiple stylistic borders since he broke into the jazz ranks in the '60s, he finds that he often returns to the straight-ahead jazz quartet setting. That's why ***Common Ground*** by the **New Gary Burton Quartet** is so special to him. "Since my very first group in 1967, I can count maybe three times that one of my groups over the years clicked so perfectly," he says. "Whenever I start a new group, I often wonder how things will work, to see if the musicians will enjoy playing together and are ready to take the music to a higher level. With the new band, I'm thrilled. It's proving to be one of the standout bands of my career and has already quickly developed its own identity."

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For more information on the Gary Burton, visit www.garyburton.com

For media information, please contact:

DL Media · 610-667-0501
Jordy Freed · jordy@dlmediamusic.com

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