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Marcus Roberts

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GEORGE M. MODLIN
CENTER FOR THE ARTS
at the University of Richmond



CAMP CONCERT HALL
BOOKER HALL OF MUSIC

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1996 • 8 PM

Marcus Roberts

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18, 1996 • 8 PM

Tallis Scholars

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 1996 • 8 PM

The Canadian Brass

Wednesday, October 16, 1996 • 8 PM
Camp Concert Hall, Booker Hall of Music



Marcus Roberts

Portraits in Blue

featuring

Richard Brown , saxophone

Vincent Gardner, trombone

David Grossman, bass

Victor Goines, saxophone

Loston Harris II, piano

Randall Haywood, trumpet

Sherman Irby, saxophone

Jason Marsalis, percussion

Ted Nash, clarinet

Marcus Printup, trumpet

Stephen Riley, saxophone

Ron Westray, trombone

Marcus Roberts

PROGRAM

Exploration

Our Love is Here to Stay

Summertime

I'll See You at One

"Special Band Feature"

(to be announced from the stage)

Express Mail Delivery

~ Intermission ~

The Mystery of Romance

Rhapsody in Blue

Marcus Roberts, piano soloist

Columbia Artists Management Inc.

Personal Direction: Laurence E. Tucker & Diane Saldick

165 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019

Sony Recordings

Also Featuring:

THE ACADEMY OF THE ASCENSION

Todd Reynolds, concertmaster

Elizabeth Knowles, violin

Laura Smith, violin

Dana Friedli, violin

Hector Falcon, violin

Conrad Harris, violin

Julian Hallmark, violin

Kyle Turner, tuba

Peter Schoettler, principal horn

Greg Evans, horn

Les Stephenson, sound engineer

Program Subject to Change.

MARCUS ROBERTS, PIANIST

The creative art of improvisation is taken to new heights by Marcus Roberts, one of today's premier jazz pianists, on not one, but two new recordings released in June 1996. The historic *Portraits in Blue*, recorded with a full orchestra, is his debut release on the Sony Classical label. A second album, *Time and Circumstance* (Columbia), is a jazz trio recording of original compositions that, he said, "explores the nuances and timing of all the critical events of a love relationship." The trio set features talented young players Jason Marsalis on drums and Roland Guerin on bass.

Portraits in Blue stands on its own merits as a landmark achievement. "Rhapsody in Blue," George Gershwin's signature classic and the album's focus piece, has been recorded many times, but this is the first time that the piece has been completely rewritten with the personalized interpretations of a particular artist. The album also included Roberts' distinctive reworkings of "Variations on 'I Got Rhythm,'" and James P. Johnson's rarely heard "Yamekraw," named for an historic black settlement on the outskirts of Savannah, Georgia. His arrangements of these classics match his remarkable and highly individual piano style with the sweep and grandeur of an orchestra combining 13 members of New York's Orchestra of St. Luke's and 18 accomplished jazz musicians, many of them alumni of Roberts' touring jazz ensembles.

"Classical music has always had a huge impact on jazz musicians," Roberts says; his personal listening mix includes Beethoven, Chopin, Mahler, Coltrane and Billie Holiday. "The basic goal of the 'Rhapsody in Blue' project is to showcase the art of improvisation from the jazz musician's perspective within a semi-classical form."

While the jazz world is intimately familiar with Roberts' work (he has recorded seven albums as a leader), the simultaneous release of *Portraits in Blue* and *Time and Circumstance* presents his artistry on another level. Roberts take the opportunity to update the music of leading American composers, while continuing to expand his own growth as a composer. "My life's work," he adds, "is to present the piano in as many settings as will bring the instrument to greater prominence."

Portraits in Blue and *Time and Circumstance* both follow the stunning success of last year's *Gershwin for Lovers*, Roberts' Columbia Records debut. That album, which presented ten gorgeously realized chestnuts from America's songbook, debuted at No. 4 on Billboard's jazz chart, staying in the top ten for almost seven months. The title was one of Columbia's best-selling jazz discs of 1994, and into 1995. The "genius" of the project, wrote *Newsweek*, "is to validate America's love for Gershwin by making his greatest hits sound new again." Vibe concurred: "Roberts takes liberties with many of the arrangements, going way beyond the archetypal love song format."

Roberts' blessed relationship with his music not only manifests itself in a physical manner, but in a spiritual one as well. "I've grown to feel that music should be therapeutic, that it can heal people. I look at what it's done for me in my life. Music represents not just the struggle, but the idealism we have in this culture." His intelligent approach allows him to express the subtleties that drive his musical passion.

Marthaniel Roberts was born in Jacksonville, Florida, on August 7, 1963. Blind since the age of five, Roberts was first exposed to music in the local church where his mother was a gospel singer. His parents bought a piano when he was eight, and he began nine years of formal training at age twelve. While a music major at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Roberts studied with Leonidus Lipovetsky, who, along with Van Cliburn, was a student of the noted Russian piano teacher Rosina Lhevinne. Roberts also cites such diverse pianists as Art Tatum, Vladimir Ashkenazy, James P. Johnson and Mary Lou Williams as early influences.

Aspiring to a career in jazz, Roberts won several statewide competitions and even earned plaudits from Florida's governor. Then, in 1982 in Chicago, he won the competition at the annual convention of the National Association of Jazz Educators, where he met pianist Ellis Marsalis, patriarch of the noted jazz dynasty. Wynton Marsalis heard Roberts play at the convention and the trumpeter asked his father to have Roberts contact him.

Marsalis went on to have a profound influence on Roberts' artistic development, as he took the young pianist under his wing. By 1985, their relationship had evolved to the point

where Marsalis invited Roberts to take over the piano chair in his quartet vacated by Kenny Kirkland. Roberts was surprised by the opportunity, but so was Marsalis; by the time the pianist joined the ensemble, he had learned its entire repertoire from tapes the trumpeter had sent. Roberts maintained a busy touring schedule with Marsalis from 1985 to 1991, and appeared on virtually all the trumpeter's jazz recordings made during that period.

Roberts continued to garner several awards, including the \$10,000 first prize at the first Thelonius Monk International Jazz Competition in 1987. He recorded six albums before signing to Columbia early in 1994. During this time, he enjoyed the distinction of being the first jazz musician to have his first three recordings reach No. 1 on *Billboard's* traditional jazz chart.

Prior to his Columbia signing, Roberts recorded a wealth of original solo and band material. He also expressed his continuing commitment to exploring the American solo piano tradition with his versions of classics by Ellington, Monk, Jelly Roll Morton and James P. Johnson. *Deep in the Shed* (1990) was a septet recording of original blues compositions featuring members of the Wynton Marsalis band as well as prominent younger musicians including Herb Harris, Chris Thomas and Scotty Barnhart. *Alone with Three Giants* (1991) was Roberts' solo piano tribute to Jelly Roll, Ellington and Monk. *People* magazine, writing about *If I Could Be With You* (1993), noted that "Roberts' gift from transforming such songs as Cole Porter's 'What Is This Thing Called Love,' Gershwin's 'Embraceable You' and Ellington's 'Mood Indigo' is marked by his ability to make his own brimming compositions sound as if they have always existed, and always will."

Roberts has toured the U.S. and Europe as a soloist, as well as with his septet and trio. He is active as an educator, conducting seminars and clinics throughout the United States. Roberts also has a special interest in working with the blind, and has recently contributed his time to projects with the Lighthouse for the Blind, and the American Foundation for the Blind, two nationally recognized organizations.

In addition, his work on behalf of the Jazz at Lincoln Center program has been most impressive. One of the highlights of the summer '93 Classical Jazz Series at Lincoln Center was the debut of Roberts' remarkably ambitious 70-minute "Romance, Swing and the Blues," de-

scribed by the *New York Post* as "a rich, life-filled and quite absorbing extended work." Its triumphant performance occurred on August 7, the pianist's 30th birthday, and it certainly marked the beginning of a very promising new decade for Roberts. A vast knowledge of the jazz canon served the artist well during his tenure as music director for the 19-member Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra during its coast-to-coast U.S. tour during the winter of 1994. Roberts selected the nightly programs and served as emcee for the mostly sold-out 30-city tour.

In April of 1994, he kicked off a year largely devoted to the work of Gershwin with a spectacular performance as a soloist with Leon Botstein's American Symphony Orchestra of "I Got Rhythm Variations" at an Avery Fisher Hall show titled "Common Ground: Jazz, African-American and Jewish Composers (1930-1955). *The New York Times* said of the performance, "The Gershwin, with splendidly vivacious piano solos played by Marcus Roberts, lifted the evening and banished politics."

The amazing success of *Gershwin for Lovers* is a brilliant indication of things to come. In addition to *Portraits in Blue* and *Time and Circumstance*, Roberts already has plans for future projects, including an album of original septet music called *Express Mail Delivery*, and a collection of his arrangements of Scott Joplin rags. He will also continue his consistent touring schedule, both in trio and orchestra configurations, throughout this year and next, during which he will be represented by both Columbia Artists Management Inc. and Short Fire Media.

ACADEMY OF THE ASCENSION

The Academy of the Ascension is conceived as a chamber orchestra/ensemble with an equal dedication to the great classic repertory, and to exploring the interplay between jazz, world music and the European/American orchestral tradition.

The first two projects of the orchestra are indicative of this breadth. In November 1995, they collaborated with Kathleen Battle in an album of sacred arias from the oratorios of Bach, Handel, Mozart and Fauré. They are currently working on an album with Marcus Roberts in his personal interpretations of the music of Scott Joplin.

The members of the Academy of the Ascension are drawn from leading New York area chamber ensembles.