

LISTENING NOTES

A tune a week

Andrea Goretti **UNUSUAL TRIO**

Andrea Goretti piano · Gabriele Fava tenor and soprano saxophones · Giacomo Ganzerli drums
Emme Record Label, 2021

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Photo Nicola Malaguti

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TRACKS 1 & 8

Timeside / Timeside again

for John Taylor

> What might a version of *Timeside* sound like three years from now? And ten?

I chose to open and close the album with the same piece, in two different versions. *Timeside* is the oldest composition on the record: I wrote it towards the end of my undergraduate jazz piano studies at the Conservatory of Parma.

It was written for my thesis on John Taylor, using compositional techniques I had discovered by transcribing and analysing his music.

Why twice? To create a circular listening experience, where coming back to the opening piece isn't simply a repetition, but a chance to revisit and transform it, looking towards the future.

To get a better feel for the musical references behind the piece, listen to the two compositions that inspired it: John Taylor's *Ambleside* and Bill Evans's iconic *Time Remembered*, one of his best-known and most influential compositions. Evans was also one of the main influences on the pianist from Manchester.

The opening version is the longer and more elaborate one. A solo piano introduction is followed by the gradual entrance of the other instruments and the statement of the theme; then comes the piano solo, and after it the saxophone solo, which builds to an expressive *climax* over the opening *vamp*. The closing version is quite different: the atmosphere is more rarefied, the references to the theme are subtler and more stretched out, and space takes centre stage.

LISTEN

Timeside	Spotify · Apple Music · YouTube
Timeside again	Spotify · Apple Music · YouTube

TRACK 2

S.L.

for Steve Lacy

> Lacy explores improvisation in depth and takes us into fantastic sound worlds.

S.L. are the initials of Steve Lacy, to whom the piece is dedicated. The starting point is *Micro Worlds*, from his extraordinary solo saxophone album "Clinkers": a sound world all of its own, built on improvisation, altissimo playing and extended techniques.



Steve Lacy, "Clinkers" – Hat Hut, 1978

The melodic line of *Micro Worlds* is largely made up of mirrored fragments and intervallic patterns. I reworked the piece by playing with these fragments: reversing them, or creating new ones from the same intervals.

Without getting too technical: the opening four-note descending diatonic riff comes from the four ascending notes that close the theme of *Micro Worlds*. A similar technique produced the short fragment that separates the piano and saxophone solos.

I owe thanks to Umberto Petrin, who set this piece in motion by asking me to write an original composition based on that very fragment.

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TRACK 3

Crepuscule

for Andrew Hill

> A piece full of air, an open space where listeners can lose themselves in imagining, remembering and dreaming.

Anyone who knows me knows how much I love Thelonious Monk. Yet, although the title may bring his *Crepuscule with Nellie* to mind, this piece is dedicated to another pianist who deserves far more attention: Andrew Hill.

It is a tribute to his *Dusk* (*crepuscule* and *dusk* mean the same thing), in which a bass line runs through the whole statement of the theme. There are two versions: a sextet recording on the album "Dusk" (2000), and a solo piano one on "Les Trinitaires" (1998).

This twilight *ballad* is pared down to the essentials. It opens with an eight-bar bass line that repeats throughout the piece, creating a backdrop that sets the mood. The melody stands out above it and, together with the bass notes, suggests a harmony for each bar. That harmony, however, isn't fixed in advance: there are no prescribed chords, and the musicians are free to explore the space with their own sensibility and interact in real time.

The piece is in 3/4, but the feel is *free-floating*: often there is no steady pulse, and the music moves with the musicians' breathing. It's a piece full of air, an open space where listeners can lose themselves in imagining, remembering and dreaming.

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TRACK 4

Azimuth Song

> A small cell climbs gradually through the registers, like a leap into outer space.

I wrote this piece in November 2017 and it has stayed with me ever since; audiences have always responded well to it in live performances. It dates from just after I finished my undergraduate jazz piano studies at the Conservatory of Parma and is closely related to *Timeside*: while writing my thesis I was listening to John Taylor constantly, and everything I wrote at the time bears his mark.



John Taylor, Norma Winstone, Kenny Wheeler, "Azimuth" – ECM, 1977

The title is a tribute to his fantastic and groundbreaking trio Azimuth, with Norma Winstone and Kenny Wheeler, who made their ECM debut in 1977 with a self-titled album. That sound helped shape the aesthetic that Manfred Eicher's label, founded just a few years earlier, was developing.

The harmonic material, made of dense and aching chords, is typical of Taylor's language. The melody, minimal and homorhythmic, is inspired by the opening track of "Azimuth", *Sirens' Song*: if you don't know it, go and listen to it right now (feel free to stop reading!). A small cell of a single interval repeats throughout the *chorus*, climbing gradually through the registers like a leap into outer space. A side note: in astronomy, the azimuth is actually only one of the two coordinates that give the direction of a star from the point of observation.

The recording opens with an improvised piano introduction that draws you straight into the atmosphere of the piece. Then theme and solos alternate very freely, with a central open section full of resonance.

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TRACK 5

Il Grinch 1

> An almost childlike melody, over harmonies that are anything but reassuring.

This piece is an ironic tribute to Christmas. It comes as a pair with its sibling, *Il Grinch 2*, which you'll find on my solo piano album "A Light in the Darkness". They are two miniatures built the same way: a sing-song, almost childlike melody, with a simple rhythmic feel and stepwise motion; a repeated A section and a B section (*bridge*) of just a few bars, written as a four-part chorale.

Underneath the nursery-rhyme tune, though, the harmonies are dense and dark, anything but reassuring. That's where the irony lies: in the contrast with the familiar cheerfulness of the Christmas season.

Because of its floating, dreamlike character, I recorded *Il Grinch 1* as a duo with Gabriele, leaving plenty of space for the harmony and melody to breathe. The theme arrives at 2:30, after a long improvisation on fragments of the tune. Another improvisation follows, more aggressive and biting, over a pedal (a bass ostinato). When that burst of energy has run its course, the piano alone brings back the theme one last time, leaving room for dreamlike, melancholy resonances.

LISTEN

Il Grinch 1 · trio	Spotify · Apple Music · YouTube
Il Grinch 2 · solo piano	Spotify · Apple Music · YouTube

TRACK 6

Going Nowhere

> I couldn't simplify one element and leave all the others unchanged.

Going Nowhere is about wandering alone and aimlessly through a modern urban labyrinth, where each of us risks losing our identity, but where we can also become invisible and find a little peace in anonymity.

It's the most recent piece on the album, and the single released ahead of it. I wrote it just a few weeks before the recording session. It marks a turning point between a group of older compositions and a new approach to writing that I've been developing specifically for this trio.

The harmonic material is clearly different from the other pieces: I left behind the Taylor-style harmonic complexity (think *Timeside*, *Azimuth Song*, *Il Grinch 1*) in favour of simpler chords. But I couldn't simplify one element and leave all the others unchanged, so I decided to focus on rhythm instead, drawing on some trends in contemporary New York jazz.

The form is simple: the theme, repeated; a drum solo over a piano and sax *background*; piano and sax solos over an ostinato; the theme again; and a coda, once more over a piano ostinato.

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TRACK 7

Rainy Day

> A few rays break through the clouds, casting a glimmer of hope.

In 2019 I played a concert for the opening of an exhibition by Luca Compiani, a painter from Parma. For the occasion I wrote a few pieces inspired by his works, which were in turn inspired by Caravaggio's *Basket of Fruit*. *Rainy Day* grew out of the two details you see below.

The piece also grew out of one of those gloomy days when the rain falls steadily and relentlessly, until a bright opening appears in the distance.

The cyclical structure of the piece mirrors the sameness of the rain: a short chord sequence repeats over and over, under a simple, lilting melody. The soprano sax opens the piece alone with a wonderful improvisation. Then piano and drums come in, building gradually to a *climax*. The piece fades out, almost turning what we've just lived through into a distant memory.



Luca Compiani, two details from the works in the exhibition (2019)

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So now you know a little more about how these pieces came to be. Not necessarily everything there is to know: some things I wouldn't even know how to explain, and others would probably change if I tried to tell them again a few years from now.

In any case, I never meant to tell you how to listen. I just wanted to share a few stories from behind the scenes, in the hope that they make the music even more interesting – or make you want to listen without thinking about it too much.

The music is yours now.

Andrea

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