

BRAITHWAITE & KATZ

Communications

NEWS RELEASE

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KOMEDA PROJECT RETURNS WITH SCOTT COLLEY AND NASHEET WAITS FOR REQUIEM, A CONTEMPORARY TRIBUTE TO THE MUSIC OF RENOWNED POLISH COMPOSER/PIANIST KRZYSZTOF KOMEDA

"...this is a jazz album, and what matters is how these musicians make Komeda's music their own. Russ Johnson's trumpet work is creative and diverse. Krzysztof Medyna is a powerful, hair-raising reed player. Pianist Andrzej Winnicki plays solos made of sudden shifts that all cohere..." — Thomas Conrad, *Stereophile* (review of group's debut *Crazy Girl*)

"Andrzej's arrangements...are sophisticated and engaging, bringing to mind the warm vibe of such classic recordings as *Kind of Blue*..." — Michael Gallant, *Keyboard*

Plenty has been written about European musicians approaching the American jazz tradition; it's far rarer to hear about American musicians bringing their heritage to distinctly European projects. Capitalizing on the critical acclaim for its debut, *Crazy Girl*, pianist/composer/arranger **Andrzej Winnicki** and saxophonist **Krzysztof Medyna** - the driving force behind **Komeda Project** - bring trumpeter **Russ Johnson** back for their new CD ***Requiem***. What makes *Requiem* different, however, and a significant evolution over *Crazy Girl*, is the enlistment of über-bassist **Scott Colley** and the equally ubiquitous drummer **Nasheet Waits**.

Like *Crazy Girl*, *Requiem*'s primary focus is to bring the music of the late, legendary Polish composer/pianist Krzysztof Komeda (*Rosemary's Baby*; *Knife in the Water*) into the new millennium with fresh arrangements, but this time the approach is far more open-ended. Sacrificing the "comfort zone" of a group familiar with the music, Winnicki and Medyna opted, instead, for the first encounter "sound of surprise" that comes from working with master musicians like Colley and Waits. "The profile of the repertoire on *Crazy Girl* was different," says Medyna. "The songs were selected more for gigging, so they were more straight-ahead."

With *Requiem*, Komeda Project aims for something different. "*Requiem* sounds freer," says Winnicki, "because there's a new rhythm section that had never encountered this music before. Krzysztof, Russ and I have performed some of its material live, but 'Prayer and Question' and 'Dirge for Europe' were brought into the studio for the first time." The initially dark-hued "Prayer and Question" leads into one of *Requiem*'s fieriest passages, with Colley and Waits' hard-swinging foundation supporting both its serpentine melody and Winnicki's most unfettered solo of the set. "Dirge for Europe" heads into previously uncharted territory, a feature for Johnson and Medyna that's bolstered by Waits' propulsive, New Orleans-influenced rhythm.

The three-part epic, "Night-time, Daytime Requiem," and equally complex, twisting and turning "Astigmatic," put a contemporary face on two of Komeda's most timeless compositions. "Komeda wrote 'Night-time' after he heard of John Coltrane's death," Winnicki explains, "and he was a huge fan, even if his music doesn't reflect it in a literal sense." It's a similar love of Coltrane that inspired Winnicki's modal "Anubis," one of *Requiem*'s two non-Komeda originals. The other, the pianist's turbulent rubato "Elutka," is expanded from its origins as a soprano sax/piano duet to become a through-composed full ensemble piece that dovetails perfectly with Komeda's "Ballad for Bernt."

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Pianist **Krzysztof Komeda** was one of Poland's most famous modern composers and band leaders during a brief life that ended in 1969, just shy of his 38th birthday. A self-taught musician, Komeda was best known for his scores to Roman Polanski films, from the director's breakthrough, *Knife in the Water* (1962), to his Hollywood hits, *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967) and *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). He also led a renowned jazz quintet, releasing the internationally acclaimed *Astigmatic* in 1966. Trumpeter Tomasz Stanko - an international jazz star for his series of groundbreaking ECM albums including *Litania* (1997), an album of all-Komeda music - was the pianist's constant band mate from 1963 to 1968. Komeda's group also featured, at one time, saxophonist Michael Urbaniak and drummer Czeslaw Bartkowski, both of whom found widespread acclaim in Urbaniak's 1970s group, Fusion, where the leader doubled on violin.

Born and raised in Poland, **Andrzej Winnicki** and **Krzysztof Medyna** have been playing together for over thirty years. They bring both a European classicism and melancholy Slavic melodism to music that's heavily refracted through the prism of the American tradition. Before moving to the United States in the late 1980s, they spent years touring Europe with the award-winning group Breakwater. Medyna was also a member of In/Formation, also featuring Czeslaw Bartkowski, touring extensively on double bills with ECM recording artist/Polish trumpet legend Tomasz Stanko. After releasing *In the Bush* in 2001, with a reformed Electric Breakwater that also featured bassist Mark Egan and drummer Rodney Holmes, Winnicki and Medyna decided to unplug, forming the all-acoustic Komeda Project in 2004.

Russ Johnson has performed with a who's who of jazz heavyweights, including Kenny Wheeler, Bill Frisell, David Liebman and Joe Lovano, in addition to leading his own groups and touring with Lee Konitz's latest nonet. Lyrical and economical with open ears and mind, Medyna describes him as "a poet of the trumpet. He is so sensitive, he can paint, and he can create a picture, making it easy for us to build something from nothing."

Scott Colley has become one of modern jazz's most in-demand bassists, playing with everyone from Pat Metheny, Jim Hall and Joe Lovano to Herbie Hancock, Kenny Werner and Brian Blade. Ever-inventive, with an innate ability to always find the right note, the perfect phrase for any context, this *Down Beat* "Rising Star" winner from 2002-2004 has been an invaluable partner on countless sessions where finding the essence of the music, with little-to-no preparation time, is a true testament to expansive talent.

Nasheet Waits has, with a résumé that includes work with Fred Hersch, Geri Allen, Steve Coleman, Stefon Harris, Andrew Hill and The Mingus Big Band, emerged as one of his generation's most important drummers. Like Colley, Waits' deep roots in the tradition are what give *Requiem* its edge - a record of unmistakably European jazz played with the swing and unmistakable conviction of an American rhythm section. Winnicki adds, "We came into this project knowing, from the get-go, that if we were going to do another record, we wanted to make it with great players at the level of Russ, Scott and Nasheet; and to have a real American rhythm section that could come in, even without any knowledge of Komeda or Stanko, and play their hearts out."

And play their hearts out they do. On *Requiem*, everyone plays their hearts out, on a program of boldly thematic and challenging charts that still possess the underlying freedom required to encourage unpredictability, even within the most scripted of arrangements. With *Requiem*, Komeda Project ups the ante on the promise of *Crazy Girl*, paying reverent homage to one of the 20th Century's great composers while bringing modernistic edge, reckless abandon, and unmistakable swing to this profoundly moving set of starkly beautiful music.