

## **Mark Turner Quartet** ***Lathe of Heaven***

**Mark Turner:** tenor saxophone

**Avishai Cohen:** trumpet

**Joe Martin:** double-bass

**Marcus Gilmore:** drums

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Mark Turner is one of the most admired saxophonists of his generation, renowned for his intimate expressivity on the full range of the tenor. *Lathe of Heaven* is his ECM leader debut, following albums for the label in the cooperative trio Fly with Larry Grenadier and Jeff Ballard, and appearances on ECM recordings by Billy Hart, Enrico Rava and Stefano Bollani. Turner leads a quartet of kindred spirits here, often entwining long serpentine lines with rising-star trumpeter Avishai Cohen, underpinned by the lithe and powerful rhythm section of bassist Joe Martin and drummer Marcus Gilmore.

*Lathe of Heaven*, produced by Manfred Eicher at New York's Avatar Studio in June 2013, has a long-breathed essence characteristic of Turner's work, with melody taking primacy. There is mystery to the album, a quality of patient storytelling to the compositions. The music also echoes with allusions to literature and relationships key to Turner's personality as a musician. The album's title references Ursula K. Le Guin's 1971 science fiction novel of the same name. There are also gestural allusions to Miles Davis and Wayne Shorter, as well as Stevie Wonder. One of the album's highlights is "Year of the Rabbit," a rangy counterpart to the title track of Fly's 2012 ECM release, *Year of the Snake*. And the closer on *Lathe of Heaven*, the melodically haunting "Brother Sister," is a new, more expansive version of a piece first heard on that Fly album.

As in Fly, the Mark Turner Quartet doesn't feature a chordal instrument. The absence of piano or guitar opens the music up, giving it an attractive spaciousness, but as Turner points out, this also makes its demands: "It allows for a certain freedom, but puts more responsibility on each player, too. With a band like this, you have to place restrictions on yourself – harmonically, rhythmically and in terms of your sound – to make strong points musically."

Trumpeter Avishai Cohen has in-depth experience of working in a band without a chordal instrument, having released three albums as leader of a trio with bassist Omer Avital and drummer Nasheet Waits. About the dynamic character of Cohen and the chemistry they have found together, Turner says: “We have a similar attention to detail in terms of intonation and melodic playing and note choice, and our sounds mix together well, because they’re both fairly centered.”

Turner has played with Joe Martin in various bands over the past 15 years. “Joe isn’t afraid to embrace the role of the bass and state that role without jumping into the roles of other instruments,” Turner says. “He’s also very harmonically sensitive, which is important in a band like this.” As for Marcus Gilmore, Turner says: “I love his sound on the instrument... his attention to lore and lineage.” Turner was spurred to call on these two players as the rhythm section for his quartet after interacting with them as a unit in a band led by Israeli guitarist Gilad Hekselman. “Joe and Marcus are willing to extrapolate while still holding things down – the rhythm, melody, the form,” Turner says.

“Ethan’s Line,” which features one of Turner’s more tunefully searching solos on an album full of them, references pianist Ethan Iverson, with whom Turner plays in the Billy Hart Quartet. The Hart release from earlier this year, *One Is the Other*, included a shorter, more swinging version of “Sonnet for Stevie,” which on *Lathe of Heaven* has become a 13-minute emotional exploration. Opening with a long, ruminative solo by Martin and colored by particularly alluring unison lines from Cohen and Turner, “Sonnet for Stevie” serves as a sort of prism that refracts the saxophonist’s relationship with the blues, past and present:

“There’s a reference in this tune, a kind of melodic quote, to Stevie Wonder’s ‘Blame It on the Sun,’ which is a song I heard a lot as a child – my stepfather had a pretty big record collection, so he and my mother listened to a lot of music around the house. I started writing this tune after a process over the past five years of asking myself the question, ‘What is the blues – and what do they mean to me?’ You know that as a jazz musician, you need to deal with the blues. But I think it should be personally meaningful, so that you have some sort of reference you can touch and hold and do something with. I actually believe the blues to be sacred – a spiritual discipline that needs to be taken seriously. I had previously avoided the blues so that I wouldn’t disrespect it. So this tune was a window for me to look back at my childhood and explore how the blues - and Stevie Wonder - affected my life.”

“The Edenist,” with Martin’s stalking bass a through-line, takes its title from science-fiction author Peter F. Hamilton, specifically his *Night’s Dawn Trilogy* and short-story collection *A Second Chance at Eden*. Again, storytelling in music is important to Turner, particularly the art of leaving enough to the imagination. For all the sheer loveliness of horn lines hovering in a weave above an earthy rhythm section, *Lathe of Heaven* has an edge that comes from long-held tension; that is, the songs unfold over time like a novel in which the seed of a mystery is planted

early but resolved only gradually. “That’s appealing to me because I like a story that has some mystery – it’s a quality of a lot of great records,” Turner says. “I like when things are defined by negative space. It creates mystery when things are left unsaid – what’s unsaid has its own meaning. This hopefully creates music with enough tension so that you’re riveted... by anticipation.”

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Mark Turner was born in Fairborn, Ohio, in 1965, and moved with his family to California at age 4, growing up outside Los Angeles. He started playing clarinet at 9 and later switched to alto, then to tenor as a teenager. Ultimately, he found his own style after exhaustive studies of the musical methodologies of John Coltrane and Warne Marsh, among others. Since moving to New York City, Turner has worked with such musicians as Paul Motian, James Moody, Lee Konitz, Tomasz Stanko, Dave Holland, Billy Hart, Brad Mehldau, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Dave Douglas, John Patitucci and the SF Jazz Collective.

Turner has appeared on dozens of recordings, including Enrico Rava’s *New York Days* and Billy Hart’s *All Our Reasons* and *One Is the Other* on ECM. With the Fly trio the saxophonist has released three albums, including two for ECM: *Sky & Country* and *Year of the Snake*. *Lathe of Heaven* is his first leader date since 2001.

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