

Glafkos Kontemeniotis

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Glafkos Kontemeniotis was born on the island of Cyprus in 1969. He showed musical interest at an early age and began studying classical piano at the age of 9. He came to New York in 1988 and studied classical piano with Paul Sheftel and jazz piano privately with Lee Evans, and later with Harold Danko at the Manhattan School Of Music. He received his MA in composition in 1998 from Hunter College. During his MA Studies he studied jazz piano with Mike Longo and composition with Anthony Branker.

He has been working professionally as a musician since he first came to New York in 1988 and has been performing extensively within the Greek and jazz communities. Performances include "Greek Musical Journey" at Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, and a musical tribute to the late jazz great Lionel Hampton at the Schomburg Center. He has performed in many clubs and venues including the Blue Note, Birdland, The Jazz Standard, Cape Cod Jazz Festival, 92nd Street Y, Cornelia Street Cafe, Lycavitos Theatre in Greece, Antigua Jazz Festival as well in various universities throughout the country, such as Yale, Cornell, Princeton and St. Louis University.

Glafkos has performed and recorded with a number of well known jazz singers and musicians in New York, including Mable Lee, Mercedes Hall, Priscilla Owens, Claudio Roditi, and Jerry Dodgion as well as the very popular Greek singer Gregory Maninakis, mostly known for his renditions of rembetika songs. His compositions and arrangements are featured in a number of recordings including "Within Reach" which features his own jazz trio "Monk For President" aka "Ear Soul Hand", "Music Of The Wings" which features his arrangements of Greek folk and rembetika songs in a jazz style, and Mercedes Hall's "Pure Emotion" which he also co-produced. He also participated in the well-known recording "Cafe Aman America", a collection of songs of the first Greek immigrants in America. For these appearances he has been favorably mentioned in many reviews including Jazz Times and Jazz Improv magazine.

His own recording "Progress" was released in April 2010 and has received great praise and highly favorable reviews.



Reviewed by Don Williamson

CD Title: "Progress"

Musicians: Glafkos Kontemeniotis, piano; Apostolos Sideris, bass; Scott Neumann

Review: Quickly. Name the most prominent jazz pianist born in Cyprus, but now living in New York City. That person can only be Glafkos Kontemeniotis, who has been performing in plain sight—and with gratifying musical results—in New York since 1988. You may not have recognized Mr. Kontemeniotis as he provided luminous accompaniment for various singers like Mercedes Hall as they enthralled audiences. And you no doubt missed, I would say with 99% certainty, Mr. Kontemeniotis as he played for Greek concerts and celebrations at places like Alice Tully Hall or The Hellenic Cultural Center with the Mikrokosmos Ensemble.

However, the pianist's progress is well noted on his latest CD, which indeed includes a beautifully expressed piece entitled, naturally, "Progress." The album itself expands upon that composition's theme and also adopts its name. As Kontemeniotis progresses from the surging, propulsive "Anthrozyte" to the unexpectedly hard-swinging "All about Monk," which contains little of Monk's dissonance or signature rivulets of upper-register notes, Kontemeniotis proves that he's an under-recognized force of jazz to be reckoned with. And so are his back-up musicians.

For Kontemeniotis has accomplished one of those sought-after results of a jazz trio: instantaneous energy freely and synaptically exchanged in milliseconds of anticipation, recognition and elaboration. The result: empathy that leads to distinctive cohesion and a unified sound. Despite Kontemeniotis' devotion to the Greek music he plays in appropriate settings or his adeptness at comping and lying low in the back-up for singers, his trio's work on *Progress* is entirely rooted in jazz.

Even though Kontemeniotis obviously finds inspiration in Thelonious Monk's innovations, he interprets songs like "Well You Needn't" with his own style

consistently throughout the album's sure progress. "Well You Needn't," jagged and quirky for sure, conforms to Kontemeniotis' ever-present penchant for elegance and sometimes swing as well. Indeed, the trio develops its own vamp for "Well You Needn't," in seven-four yet, at least until the quickened bridge. The irregular meter governs the tune's interpretation according to Kontemeniotis' penchants while referring to Monk's melody. The trio tells us "All about Monk" in Kontemeniotis' own offbeat composition, still a combination of dynamically charged swing and darting accents, as it reveals more about its own members. Listen to bassist Apostolos Sideris' aggressive, solid lead-in to the track before it carries through the rest of the piece, adding immeasurably to its irresistible propulsion. Drummer Scott Neumann can be best appreciated on the album's first track, "Anthrozyte," which coheres largely as a result of his energetic rumbling force, evolving into a tour de force of a solo, complete with a narrative containing a beginning, build-up, climax and ending.

Including an entire range of music in his repertoire, most of which Kontemeniotis composed, the trio slows for an eloquent, understated delivery of his song, "There Won't Be You." It undergoes several improvisation choruses elevated by the pulse of Sideris' bass and the varied, dignified colors of Neumann's work, mostly on tom-toms and splashing cymbals. Kontemeniotis' "Clouds of Doubt," though freer rhythmically, proceeds in similar fashion, with chiming upper-register chords as a soft, suggestive introduction and then a gradually unfurling, unpredictable reverie. Sideris takes an extended solo on the minor-keyed, impressionistically inspired piece of dissonances, long tones and rubato interpretation. As for standards, Kontemeniotis includes a clip-clopping re-harmonized "Seven Steps to Heaven" of staggered and then rippling phrases; a spare, understated version of "Beautiful Love" that provides opportunity for fluid improvisation and Neumann's textured solo; and an iridescent, ever so gradually dynamically intensifying treatment of "A Child Is Born."

With the release of *Progress*, Glafkos Kontemeniotis has presented an album dedicated solely to his interests in jazz, furthered by his earlier studies with Harold Danko and Mike Longo. Even so, Kontemeniotis' music is unmistakably personal, derived from a style that flows from his own personality, rather than borrowing from other jazz musicians or other genres, proficient though he may be in those as well. Kontementiotis' sidemen were well chosen, and together they comprise a trio that deserves close listening.

EJAZZNEWS

CD Reviews: Glafkos Kontemeniotis, "Progress"

By: Edward Blanco May 17, 2010

Glafkos Kontemeniotis is a classically-trained pianist and composer—originally from Cyprus but living and playing professionally in the New York area since 1988—makes his recording debut as leader with a command performance on the new finely crafted "Progress" album. This starter disc features eleven creative originals and fresh interpretations of four standards employing Greek bassist Apostolos Sideris and the versatile New York drummer and educator Scott Neumann in a standard piano trio format. The pianist opens the program in a technically assertive fashion on "Anthorzyte" playing hard yet stylish and sharing the piece with Neumann's solo.

The Victor Feldman/Miles Davis tune "Seven Steps To Heaven", features a demonstration of the pianist's appreciable chops on the instrument as well as a fine well-plucked bass solo from Sideris. The first truly gentle piece of music is in fact the original title tune where Glafkos engages in a slow dialogue with his band mates producing one of the softer textured numbers of the album. This is followed by "There Won't Be You", bathed in the warm color and just happens to be a beautiful piece of music and one of the pillars of the album.

The spirit of the great Thelonious Monk hovers over the disc where Glafkos pays respectful tribute on his perky original "All About Monk", then provides his own interpretation of the Monk standard "Well You Needn't", with nimble finger play on the keys perhaps a bit like the way Monk used to do. Other highlights here include the Victor Young tune "Beautiful Love", "A Child Is Born" and the dynamic "257" original.

Clearly the most ambitious piece on the album is the lengthy nine and a half minute original "Clouds Of Doubts", offering some of the pianist's most tender solo moments. No ordinary trio recording, "Progress" documents an especially sensitive performance from an exceptional pianist in Glafkos Kontemeniotis who—with this first effort as leader—succeeds in making an elegant musical statement. Glafkos and crew deliver a set of light contemporary jazz with a modern touch, well done.

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Quotes

JazzReview.com June 2010

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EJazzNews May 2010

No ordinary trio recording, "Progress" documents an especially sensitive performance from an exceptional pianist in Glafkos Kontemeniotis who succeeds in making an elegant musical statement. Glafkos and crew deliver a set of light contemporary jazz with a modern touch, well done.

JazzTimes June 2007

Shaping the majority of these 14 tracks in tandem with pianist and arranger Glafkos Kontemeniotis (a name I'd never previously heard but, after this, want to hear a lot more from)...

JazzImprovNY July 2008

Kontemeniotis on piano is absolutely stunning and his solo on this tune made you not want it to end.

Anthony Branker

The CD 'Progress' by pianist/composer Glafkos Kontemeniotis is a wonderful project filled with writing that truly reflects his unique voice as a composer. "Anthrozyte," "Progress," and "All About Monk" are compositions that will truly give the listener great insight into the creative gifts of this emerging talent.