

Brian Bromberg *The Magic of Moonlight*



“The music comes first.” That phrase tends to come up a lot when speaking to **Brian Bromberg**. The Grammy®-nominated bassist and composer uses those words to explain just why his output has been so disorientingly eclectic over the course of his four-decade career. Encompassing straight-ahead acoustic jazz, smooth and contemporary jazz, rock-oriented fusion and cinematic variety, R&B grooves and Latin rhythms, blistering virtuosity and infectious grooves, it’s impossible to predict what might spring up next from the bassist and composer’s prolific imagination.

Bromberg employed the same phrase to recall how his latest album, *The Magic of Moonlight*, came to be. As usual, he didn’t set out on his latest project with a theme or mood in mind; instead, he went about his day singing scraps of melody or hooks into his phone, gradually accumulating enough ideas that a sound begins to emerge. Guided by the music, he found himself crafting a spirited new set of contemporary jazz tunes that foreground vibe and soulfulness rather than aggressive virtuosity (though Bromberg’s jaw-dropping skills are still on dazzling display).

As it turned out, *The Magic of Moonlight* is both an evocative and an apt title for this latest outing; as opposed to its predecessor, the freewheeling, open-road feel of *A Little Driving Music*, Bromberg’s latest album is deeply imbued with the shadow-cloaked mystery and twilight romance of an evening under the full moon. The feeling is also captured on the Magic Hour wonder of “The Pink Moment,” the nickname for the multi-hued sunset on the Topatopa Mountains near Bromberg’s home outside Ojai, California.

“There’s a little bit of mystique in the moonlight,” Bromberg muses. “This album has some mysterious vibes and spirituality along with the feel-good, positive energy, so the name just seemed to fit.”

Originally from Tucson, Arizona, Bromberg started out on the drums before switching to the bass at the behest of his junior high school band director – though that driving, rhythmic foundation has remained a core component of Bromberg’s sound. With the help of bass great Marc Johnson, then touring as a member of the Bill Evans Trio, Bromberg landed a gig with the legendary saxophonist Stan Getz in late 1979, when he was just 19 years old.

Bromberg has hardly stopped for a moment’s breath since then. In the ensuing decades he’s performed, recorded or toured with a stunning roster of artists across a spectrum of genres. While it might be easier to list the names that he hasn’t played with, a partial list of collaborators will have to suffice: Joshua Redman, Roy Hargrove, Sarah Vaughan, Bob James, George Benson, Lionel Hampton, Chris Botti, Najee, Whitney Houston, Christina Aguilera, Diana Krall, Dizzy Gillespie, Josh Groban, Mike Stern, Dave Koz, Sting, Michael Brecker, Stanley Clarke, Stanley Jordan – even Jerry Lewis. And that’s just scratching the surface.

1986's *A New Day* launched Bromberg's solo career, while his follow-up, *Basses Loaded*, cemented his place in the front ranks of bass innovators. In the years to follow he released a series of acoustic jazz projects alternating with more electric contemporary outings. He recorded tributes to Jaco Pastorius, Jimi Hendrix and Antonio Carlos Jobim and fronted a full orchestra. Throughout he's captivated audiences and fellow musicians with his staggering agility on an array of basses: four- and five-string axes, hollowbody electric, acoustic, and the piccolo bass, on which his shredding solos rival the speed and versatility of any electric guitar wizard.

The Magic of Moonlight features an all-star roster of guests tailored to the music that Bromberg has devised for the sessions, supplementing a core band that includes drummers Joel Taylor and Tony Moore, keyboardist Tom Zink, guitarist Gannin Arnold and percussionist Lenny Castro. Smooth jazz sax superstar Everette Harp graces three tunes, playing tenor on the title track and the breezy, wind-in-your-hair "Last Day of Summer", and soprano on the tender "The Third Child," lovingly dedicated to Bromberg's sister. Fusion sax great Gary Meek, well known for his long association with Airta Moreira and Flora Purim, adds his sinuous soprano to the winsome "Just Another Beautiful Day."

Charlie Bisharat's mesmerizing violin and Grant Geissman's sitar guitar combine to add a tinge of otherworldliness to the fusion-driven exoticism of "The Orient Express," while Lin Rountree's muted trumpet is the sassy topper on the attitude-fueled funk of "So, You Think You're All That?" The bassist's nephew, producer/composer Zach Bromberg, lends his modernistic, R&B-inspired grooves to "A New Dawn" and "Bedtime Story," both uncharacteristic tunes that take the pair into soulful new territory – an almost new age blissfulness on the former, lullaby-inflected lyricism on the latter.

"I love collaborating with Zach because it makes me go places that I would not normally go," Bromberg says. "His music is very different than mine, but sometimes he'll write something that just paints an amazing picture that opens up new doors for me."

The album is marked by loss as much as presence. The album concludes with the spiritual optimism of "In the Hands of God," in which Bromberg's nimble bass and the massed horns take on the role of a gospel choir. "Nico's Groove" was written for the renowned smooth jazz guitarist Nick Colionne, who passed away on New Year's Day, 2022 at the age of just 55. Colionne had recorded with Bromberg on *A Little Driving Music* and performed with the bassist at the Berks Jazz Fest. "The song is full of life and energy, which really sums Nick up," Bromberg says. "It felt good to be able to dedicate something to him because he was such a sweetheart of a cat."

Though few instrumentalists could combine spellbinding musicianship with entrancing songcraft quite like Bromberg, ***The Magic of Moonlight*** is another left-field surprise in a discography full of them. "It's impossible for me to make the same record twice," Bromberg shrugs. "I like to surprise people. The music comes first."