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Geof Bradfield, Richard D. Johnson, John Tate and Samuel Jewell Honor Musical Mentors on *Our Heroes*, a New Collaborative Album out September 8 via AFAR Music



There is a harmonious convergence of exceptional Chicago talent on ***Our Heroes***, the latest collaborative project from **AFAR Music**, due out on **September 8, 2023**. Featuring saxophonist **Geof Bradfield**, pianist **Richard D. Johnson**, bassist **John Tate** and drummer **Samuel Jewell**, *Our Heroes* pays tribute to a selection of adored musical idols through a collection of nine heartfelt and soul-stirring original compositions.

Our Heroes is the latest in a series of themed collaborative projects under the direction of pianist and label founder, Richard D. Johnson. Previous releases featured two instrument-specific supergroups: ***Altoizm*** (2021) with alto saxophone wizzes Sharel Cassity, Greg Ward and Rajiv Halim, and ***Tenor Time*** (2022) featuring tenor saxophone masters John Wojciechowski, Geof Bradfield, and Scott Burns. Rounding out the trilogy is *Our Heroes*, on which the focus shifts to something more conceptual: honoring musical legends that have left a lasting impact on these jazz all-stars, and extending their lineage of mentorship. “Speaking as a musician and educator, I think it’s important for the students of this music to realize that their mentors have heroes too,” Johnson says.

To bring his concept to life, Johnson enlisted three Chicago heavy-weights in Bradfield, Tate and Jewell. Bringing musicians together is Johnson's specialty, and *Our Heroes* continues the AFAR Music tradition of combining great musicians in new contexts. While the ensemble had played together in different configurations prior, the recording of *Our Heroes* is the first time they've all played as a unit. Bradfield and Tate added a cadre of compositions each dedicated to a musical hero to Johnson's four, and before they knew it, they had a record.

The album kicks off with a pair of Johnson-penned compositions: "**Corea**", written for the great Chick Corea, who was a source of encouragement and inspiration for the pianist, and "**Loved Ones**", inspired by the great Percy Heath, and written for Johnson's family. Bradfield's gospel-tinged "**Some Other Sunday**" comes next, and was inspired by Duke Ellington's "Come Sunday" as the title suggests. Hidden under the surface, the theme is actually a fragment from Debussy's String Quartet. Nodding to Benny Green, Richard Johnson's acrobatic "**Caution**" is an album highlight. "Listening to Benny play two handed lines on the piano at a blazing pace made me say 'wow!'. I then decided that I need to write something in dedication to that high level of playing - even if I can't play it!" Johnson expresses. Bradfield shows off his range on multiple fronts on Johnson's final dedication on the record, "**High and Low**", written for saxophone masters Phil Woods, Jackie McLean and Jimmy Heath.

"**Blues for Stanley Cowell**" comes next, and is dedicated to the often overlooked pianist-composer. "I love his exploratory yet soulful aesthetic and the rough and tumble Strata East records that he founded with Charles Tolliver. The harmonic and melodic material is derived from some playful manipulation of a motif by composer Joan Tower, an equally surprising and iconoclastic voice," explains Bradfield. Two of Tate's compositions come next: "**Aspartame**", influenced by saxophone giants Wayne Shorter and Joe Henderson, and the pensive "**Peaceful Giant**" written for his mentor, the great Ron Carter. The album closes with the rousing "**The Cruellest Month**", written on the chord changes of the standard "I'll Remember April" and borrows its title from the T.S. Elliot's masterpiece "The Waste Land".

Our Heroes is another poignant entry of the AFAR Music discography, and one that Johnson is most proud of, both because of the music and due to the message. "It's important that listeners understand that this music is passed on from generation to generation. Jazz comes in many forms today, but whatever that form is, the relationship between a mentor and mentee shouldn't be replaced, and having a mentor is something that must be searched out. A hero adds a tremendous amount of value in a musician's playing and outlook on life," he shares.

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1. Corea (Johnson)
2. Loved Ones (Johnson)
3. Some Other Sunday (Bradfield)
4. Caution (Johnson)
5. High & Low (Johnson)
6. Blues For Stanley Cowell (Bradfield)
7. Aspartame (Tate)

8. Peaceful Giant (Tate)
9. The Cruellest Month (Bradfield)