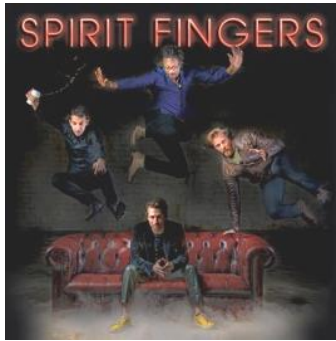


**GREG SPERO's**  
**SPIRIT FINGERS**  
**"SPIRIT FINGERS"**  
Shanachie 5457  
UPC 1635154572



**TRACKS**

1. inside 4:40
2. maps 6:56
3. try 1:20
4. for 7:07
5. movement 1:56
6. find 8:12
7. space 1:45
8. release 6:44
9. location 1:29
10. being 5:41
11. you 5:27
12. realize 2:13

The inaugural album by the jazz super-group, **Spirit Fingers**, features 4 of the hottest young lions on the jazz scene today, led by **Greg Spero**. Having played to sold out audiences from New York to LA and having already attracted over 300,000 views on YouTube, the over-the-top energy and spectacular virtuosity of Spirit Fingers reaches across the spectrum, from the jazz aficionado to the jam band audience and beyond!

**GREG SPERO – PIANIST/COMPOSER**

(winner of Best Jazz Entertainer at the Chicago Music Awards, music director for electropop superstar **Halsey**)

**HADRIEN FERAUD** Parisian **BASSIST**

(John McLaughlin, Kamasi Washington, Chick Corea)

**DARIO CHIAZZOLINO** Italian **GUITARIST**

(Dave Liebman, Buika, Taylor Eigsti)

**MIKE MITCHELL (AKA BLAQUE DYNAMITE)** – Dallas prodigy **DRUMS**

(Stanley Clark, Christian McBride, Chrisette Michelle)

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**Greg Spero – Social Media/Internet contact:**

Tiny Room: <https://www.tinyroom.live>

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“Hey guys Weekly Piano here, I’ve been asked to answer a few interview questions and I decided to do it on tape because I feel like there might be a few of you that want to know these things about me. I haven’t really done any interviews on a personal level yet on this channel so I thought it might be fun. Anyways, the first question I need to answer is :

**How did you start playing music and who drew you to it?”**

When I was about a year old my mom took a photo of me, and I was sitting on my grandmother’s knee, and I was banging on the piano. It’s a really cute photo, it’s one of my favorites. I know I wasn’t playing music at the time, and I don’t really know when it turned into music but when I was about three years old my mom tells me I started writing melodies and creating little compositions on the piano. So it was sometime in that intrum that music was made.

Music has a long lineage in my family. Both my parents are pianists, and my grandpa is a pianist and his dad was also a pianist who had a band that played on a cruise ship that went across the Atlantic Ocean and back. I can’t remember what it was called but it was a big band and they played Dixieland music. I don’t know what happened with his parents and grandparents but I can imagine that the lineage goes beyond that too. My dad was in a country band for awhile and he had a band “Kevinly and the Lonesome City Kings” when I was a child. That band was on the road when I was about five years old. I have these fond memories of listening to my dad’s tapes of his band when he was out on tour and thinking of him. In fact, there are a lot of those songs that I can still sing by heart because they’re so engraved into my memory.

My mom is a classical piano teacher, she taught my whole life so I would grow up with the classical repertoire playing in the background while I was doing my homework or playing with my friends. Every afternoon she taught for hours. I never really studied with her but eventually I picked up on a lot of the exercises that she taught to her piano students and I started plucking them out on the piano and figuring them out by myself. Eventually I studied with her for a couple of years, but I never studied formally until college and it was then in college where I really began to digest the works of Chopin, Beethoven and Bach and get into classical music and also dive deeply into jazz and start transcribing. Before that I’d played a lot of Blues music and rock, I’d sang and wrote songs played them. I’d played some guitar, a little bit of drums and a little bit of bass. But it was in college where I really started to do the normal practice routine rather than playing for fun.

Though in my playing for fun I had been playing professionally even before that. When I was 14 I joined a band called the “Slack Daddies”, which was the band was dad was in at the time and I played with him. I played the organ and he played the piano and we’d switch off sometimes. He eventually had to leave the group because he got to busy so I became the only keyboardist in the group. It was other guys that were in their 40s and I was the one kid who was 14 years old, they called me “the kid”. Then eventually when I was 15 I joined a fusion band called “Bucket Shop” and we played the works of the Chick Corea Elektric Band, Jaco, Jean-Luc Ponty and then a bunch of modern fusion stuff.

I was in that band until I went to college and then when I came back from college I joined Frank Russell's band back in Chicago and actually when I was in college a guy named Robert Irving III took me under his wing and he became a very dear mentor to me. He was one of the first guys to really guide me in terms of jazz on the piano. One of the things that drew me to music was my high school band director; well he drew me to jazz. Before that it was my parents that drew me to music and it was all multi genre but then I really started getting into jazz more when I was in high school because the jazz band was the cool thing to do which is kind of ironic. His name is Dan Brame, he just retired last year.

**"Tell us about your education."**

I went to the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana and I did the equivalent of three majors: Jazz Piano Performance, Music Composition and Graphic Design because I wasn't sure at the time that I was ever going to make a living off of music. I had a website development company that was doing well at the time because I also was into programming and had gotten into flash animation and all the things that were new at the time. I was coding in html before there were any interfaces to do websites. It was actually kind of funny because in college I also worked on some tech start-ups, but I majored in music so I did music all throughout the day and then at night I would work on programming for these tech start-ups. Kind of the flip of what I think most people did when they had a passion for music; where they would do major in tech during the day and then play music at night.

My real education started after college when I was in Chicago and playing in bands like Frank Russell's bands and playing with Robert Irving III. And then I started touring with a buddy "Rich Big Band", and this is after Buddy had died when I was around 2. I toured with Kathy Rich and Greg Potter and the rest of the band. We went to London and played at the Palladium in London. I played with Dave Weckl and John Blackwell. That's when I started touring with John Blackwell's band and recording a bunch of tracks that he used in his drum clinics. I would say those things were my real music education, though I did get a lot out of the University of Illinois.

**"What are your hobbies?"**

I don't keep very many hobbies. I tend to obsess over music in every way possible, and I tend to spend my free time on music. You could call a hobby of mine exercise, I like to exercise, I exercise everyday. Lately I've been on a schedule of getting up in the morning at 6 AM and working out from 6:30-7:30 and then doing the steam room. So, health, health is a hobby of mine. I have a terrible sugar addiction and it's very important that I stick to a strict diet otherwise I always go off the deep end with desserts. I used to love to paint. I would paint a lot and I might get back into it one day.

But really there's so much to obsess about with music that I don't spend much time on anything else, especially now that I am trying to run a career of music and not just do the music which requires managing tours, managing a band, personalities, a studio. I have a video series that I do out of my studio in Los Angeles, it's called Tiny Room. I bring in a bunch of my colleagues in the Jazz world like Butcher Brown and Terreon Gully, and I do videos of them doing their works but in a different context where you really wouldn't normally hear

them. Like for Butcher Brown we did an acoustic set. I toured with Halsey for three years and I have a lot of connections in the pop world from that so the one thing I have done for the Tiny Room series is bring in pop artists to collaborate with jazz artists. For example, I had Cheat Codes come in and collaborate with Gene Coy and Solomon Dorsey, who are two great jazz musicians. We did a really cool rendition of their hit song "No Promises". So, you could call that a hobby of mine.

I guess another hobby is technology, I love technology. I don't have a Tesla but I am very interested in the cars. I'm building an app right now that has to do with crowdfunding for artists. I won't go into specifics of it but it's a new technology. So you could say technology is one of my hobbies.

Music is a hobby and a profession. I love transcribing, right now I'm transcribing a Herbie Solo from Actual Proof. It's one of my favorite solos. But I love transcribing Keith Chauret, and also sax players Cannonball Adderley is one of my favorites to transcribe.

**"Tell us about your recent and significant travels."**

For the past three months I've been on the road with a couple different operations. One has been my band Spirit Fingers, Makaya McCraven and I also Nubya Garcia, a great sax player out of London. These travels were grueling, it was like a show every night and then traveling in the morning, often a 6am lobby call, to then go play another show the next night in another country, and then travel the next morning. We'd have like a day off every week which was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. I've never done it on jazz tours for this long as I did this past summer, which was a solid three months of touring.

I did three years on the road with Halsey but that was not as many shows back to back as with these jazz shows. It was amazing, one of my favorite things to do on the road is experience the food in different countries. I remember going somewhere in Scandinavia and going to this traditional Scandinavian restaurant and ordering the herring. It was just this pile of herring on a plate and fried like I had never experienced it before. Or going to Madrid and having a rabbit stew and some squid ink concoction. It can be a little off-putting at first but it is very exciting to try the food of different cultures.

The past Spirit Fingers tour that I did in London was also incredible. To play my own music night after night with people who are interested in trying to progress it and execute it as intensely and proficiently as possible is such an incredible experience because this music is not easy. It's the hardest music that I have written in my life thus far and I didn't even really mean for it to be played when I was writing it. But it was after Mark Cavanaugh heard the music and then convinced me to form a band out of it that I started practicing it and really figuring out how to execute the music because a lot of it is in weird time signatures like 17:16 or 13:16.

**"Have you received any awards?"**

Competitions and awards in the music world represent the antithesis of what music is about. You have the Grammy Awards for example. You don't win a Grammy by having the best record, you win a Grammy by having the most people know about your record and want to support you. That's very

different from making a profound work of art. The same goes for any jazz competition. Thelonious Monk would not have won the Thelonious Monk competition if he had participated in it because his work was too groundbreaking, too original and too much not subscribing to the norms of the time to be accepted as the greatest by the standard of the time. It was only after he did what he did for a long period of time that he became known as one of the greatest. It takes such a long time to absorb and understand anything that is different from the status quo. So it ends up being the status quo that gets the most attention, and the status quo that ends up winning competitions.

That being said, I have received a couple of awards, like “The Best Jazz Entertainer” in Chicago from the Chicago Music Awards. I wrote a brass quintet that won an award and was performed in Chicago but I cannot remember the name of the award. There have been some others but they go way into the back of my mind because I don’t find them important in the slightest.

**“Do you teach or are you otherwise involved in education?”**

That’s something that I find important. The greatest artists in history have also been teachers; maybe not the greatest teachers but they’ve all been teachers. Every great musician that you hear about has been a mentor to other musicians that some of which also became great musicians in their own way. Miles Davis was notorious for that. Bringing people into his band that were young and could be conceptually molded into artists that would be as great as he was. Herbie does the same thing, great artists throughout history have always educated. Not necessarily in academia, in fact you have a lot of musicians that just weren’t able to make it in the real world that then went to academia so that they could teach and make a living because it is hard to make a living in music.

That being said, yes I do teach but I do not teach in the traditional sense. Every once in a long while I will come across a student who is passionate to be really taught, and I will give them lessons. But, they tend to be older, I don’t teach beginners. I have started a Youtube channel where I give lessons online to other pianists about what I’m working on at the time. I’ve been doing it for about 10 years, and it has grown to about 24,000 subscribers, all of whom are pianists who are interested in jazz and I have very rewarding and exciting interactions with the pianists on that channel. I only upload videos when I am genuinely excited about something and I want to share it with other pianists who might also be interested in it. It’s kind of funny, I’ve been touring around festivals now and at almost every show there is at least someone who watches my channel and they come up to me and say I’m a fan of “Weekly Piano”. But then every once in a while there will be young pianists playing in other bands who have subscribed to my channel. There’s a guy named Deschanel, and he approached me at a recent festival and said that he’s 21 years old now but he has been watching my channel since he was 16 and he had played and he picked up a lot of the stuff that I play and that I’ve shown the people on my channel. It makes me really happy and it’s very rewarding to see that other people are getting something out of the videos that I have put up. I just put the videos up when I am interested in the subjects, and that is how I educate.

**“Do you have any stories about a teacher or a name player with whom you’ve worked? Things they’ve told you that changed things for you?”**

One of the people that has affected my life and playing is the most profound way has been Herbie Hancock. I met him about 10 years ago snuck backstage at a festival in Chicago, and I followed him around that day trying to ask him about technical things that he was playing and it was really hard to start a dialogue with him in that way. I eventually asked him how he expanded his creativity and that led to a conversation about Buddhism, which to this day has been a deep staple in my life and has held a foundational place for how I live life, and also how I create music. Herbie did end up teaching me some aspects on how he plays piano, and has helped me with various things like technique and concept. But, it has been much more than that in terms of how he has affected my life in terms of a human being through introducing me to Buddhism. It’s a staple in how I live everyday, which actually that can go back to the hobby question “what are some of your hobbies” and you could almost call it a hobby because every morning when I wake up I do a meditation, and every night when I go to sleep I do that same meditation. Often on plane rides I’ll do that same meditation for hours. It’s a chanting meditation where you say the words “Nam Myoho Renge Kyo”, which has a very profound meaning that I won’t go into right now. My interactions with him have had a very profound effect on my life.

Quincy Jones has also been a mentor and a guide for me over the past 6 years or so. He is also a business partner as I’m working with Qwest TV to distribute the Tiny Room series that I have been doing in my studio. But, Quincy is one of the most profound individuals I have ever met. I remember him telling me a lot of the stories that eventually came out in the interview that he did that blew up and got him a rejuvenation of his fame. He is one of the most free and introspective and thoughtful individuals that I’ve ever met and inspires me to be free and thoughtful and introspective. He and Wayne Shorter possess some of the same qualities. Wayne is another friend of mine that I met through this Buddhism that I practice. They both tend to live with a childlike mentality of fearlessness and living life like it is a game that we play and we only have so much time to play and we want to play it as best as we can in the time that we have. Wayne has these figurines that he sets up at his house, that have these little fantasy stories with fairies and gnomes and things. It’s really profound. In my discussions with Wayne about music when I asked him how I can gain more depth in my music he told me you don’t gain depth in your music, you expand your life. So you read a new book or watch a new movie and embrace these other aspects of creativity in your life and it comes out through your music. Those have been some very significant and inspirational figures to me in my life and how I play music.

**“Do you have any family members that are musical, and have you collaborated with them?”**

Like I said earlier in the interview my family members are generally musical, even my little brother and my little sister play music even though they don’t do it professionally. They’re very talented. I did a show, we called it “All in the Family” and I did it 5 or 6 years ago with my sister, brother, mom, dad and grandpa, the whole family participated in it. We wrote songs together and produced them and then ended up

with this performance that we did at a festival somewhere north of Chicago. So yeah, we did a whole collaboration. I think there's a recording of it somewhere out there.

**"Tell us about your most significant music collaborations."**

One of my best friends, and my most significant partners in crime as I call it is Makaya McCraven. I met him outside the house of a party this guy Tim Green was hosting in Chicago about 13 years ago. He was just moving to Chicago and I was just getting back from college. We both got stuck outside Tim's house because nobody could hear the buzzer when we were trying to buzz up. He had a case of beer and I was just standing there. I thought he was like 40 years old, but he was like 23 or something like that. He's been one of my best friends ever since then. It was kind of funny, when we went up to the party, it was a jam session, and we had just met outside but we were like let's play together we might as well your a drummer and I'm a pianist. He said to me, I should warn you, they're playing a lot of chill music here but I like to play loud and I said I think we're going to make really great friends. It was sort of a match made in heaven.

After that we formed what we called the "Spero x McCraven Duo" and played some shows at rock clubs where it was just like this really cool loud, electronic, infused, improvised and instrumental music. Makaya came on my tours in the UK, I've been on Makaya's tours, we've played on each other albums, Makaya has been my drummer on all of my albums up until the SPIRIT FINGERS project where I've been using Mike Mitchell which is also a very significant collaborator of mine. I love great drummers. The drummer in a group is something that plays a huge part in how I play my instrument. I get a lot of my inspiration moment to moment from what the drummer is playing, so that is why I gravitate towards drummers that have a lot of ideas to portray like Makaya who is highly musical, or Mike who has more chops than anyone else who plays the drums, like probably literally; and is also deeply musical and very exciting in his playing.

**"Most significant, amazing, interesting gig?"**

The most interesting gig I've ever played was probably with a buddy Rich Big Band at the Palladium in London. This was a drummer fest, it was the first time I ever played with Dave Weckl and John Blackwell and even the drummer from Cream, he's an asshole. But I respect him, I respect assholes. Keith Jared is an asshole and I respect the fuck out of him. He's one of the most profound people and musicians that I've ever met. But anyways, that was one of the most significant gigs I have played. They took the cream of the crop from London as far as horns go, and incredibly talented musicians. And then brought in some incredible drummers, and I also got to play with the singer from Iron Maiden, Bruce Dickinson. I think we did Smoke on the Water, that was also with the drummer from Cream. That was my most significant and interesting gig. I mean, sort of, because all of the festivals, like anytime I played with Spirit Fingers it has been an incredibly profound experience.

We've played festivals all over the world, and with Makaya so it's actually really hard to say that that was the most significant because it probably wasn't. I've also played arenas around the world with Halsey and played in front of 15,000 people every night. That's almost a distant memory now even though I left the band not even 2 years ago.

With the Halsey project we started and we were playing to 80 people every night, the first show was to 80 people at SIR in Los Angeles. It was right when she got signed to Capitol Records and they got rid of her high school band and wanted to hire some people who could really fill out the music in a deeper way. So, they hired me and a guy named Nate Watts to be the live band. I designed all of the sounds for that show, and for the entire three years that I was with Halsey I designed all of the sounds that were used for the live keyboard parts, and it was mostly keyboard parts when it was live because it is a very synthesizer base sound that she has.

By the end of my run with her we were playing Madison Square Garden, multiple times. all the major award shows, all the late night tv shows, and I finally put in my retirement the day we played Saturday Night Live because I felt like that was the furthest that I could take the group up and I needed to focus on my own music after that. I was so happy to put in the time and effort in that group that I did and I had some of the most amazing travel experiences of my life up to that point. I had never traveled the world like that. We hit everywhere in the world. Six of the seven continents. We played in most of the major cities, and that was quite a wild ride for me. After I left that group I started playing more of the music I love, which is jazz, my heart and soul. I was then able to focus fully on my band SPIRIT FINGERS to the point where now we are doing international tours. I'm doing exactly what I wanted to do from a musical perspective which is challenge myself as deeply as I can challenge myself, and expand with every performance.

Self-challenge I would say is another one of my hobbies. It might sound a little maskatistic, but I like to try and see how hard I can work out or how intensely I can stress out my body by staying in the steam room for a long time, how far I can run, how long I can practice in a row, how long I can meditate, and how deep I can go into a concept. Like the way I am exploring Polyrhythmic concept that turned into SPIRIT FINGERS.

**"Any other personal tidbits or anecdotes that might help tell us your story?"**

Music is a way of life for me. I feel like it's the thing that I have to offer in this world and so I dedicate myself fully at the expense of pretty much every other aspect of my life because it is hard to have balance when you obsess to deeply over something. I'm absolutely in love with it and enthralled with it, and I am really appreciative of all the people who help me make it the centerpiece of my life and help me focus on creating, and there are a lot of people, there are so many people who help in the process of making a career for a musician. I have a great depth of appreciation for them. I have had so much support over the years.

That's all I've got, I hope this interview has been helpful.

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