

GOING FOR ADDS: SEPT 23rd, 2022 **FILE: JAZZ**

ARTIST: JEFF DENSON / ROMAIN PILON / BRIAN BLADE

TITLE: Finding Light

LABEL: Ridgeway Records RRCD018

COPYRIGHT: 2022

AVAILABLE: Digital Platforms



Shining Through the Pandemic Darkness, the Extraordinary Trio of Bassist Jeff Denson, Drummer Brian Blade and Guitarist Romain Pilon offer a Celebratory Second Album, Finding Light

TRACKS

1. **Daily Jubilee Of Dancing Herbie D. 5:33**
2. **Finding Light 4:21**
3. **This Way Cooky 5:51**
4. A Moment In Time 7:43 out
5. Wishing Well 4:37
6. The Tipster 4:39
7. Terre Intro 2:04
8. Terre 5:01
9. Espoir 7:06
10. Sixto 7:38

MUSICIANS

Jeff Denson, bass
Romain Pilon, guitar
Brian Blade, drums

The initial sparks ignited in 2017 when Denson and Blade played together on a tour with Joel Harrison. "Brian and I clicked right away," Denson says. His hunch about bringing in his old friend Pilon proved fruitful, and the trio was born.

The extraordinary chemistry and joy in music making is evident on every track of the celebratory Finding Light.

SOCIAL HANDLES

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffDensonMusic>

IG: jeffdensonmusic

Twitter: @DensonJeff

YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIFpC_R0Li4KSABW8U_GMug

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Aquh8zmg9GT40MTYQFp9r0EU4xHa>

The first time that bassist Jeff Denson and guitarist Romain Pilon got together to record with drummer Brian Blade felt like a lightning strike. Like so many musicians before them, the longtime friends from their days as standout students at Berklee experienced what's often been described as the Blade Factor, a sudden, clarifying jolt that illuminates the musical moment. Captured in the studio on the 2019 Ridgeway Records album *Between Two Worlds*, the trio's debut introduced an uncommon communion that seemed destined for further adventures.

Even two years of pandemic angst hasn't been able to dim their brilliant chemistry. If anything, the trio's second album, *Finding Light*, blazes all the more brightly as an antidote to isolation, anxiety, and despair. Slated for release on Denson's **Ridgeway Records** label on **September 23, 2022**, the project beams with the palpable pleasure the musicians take in each other's company as they explore new music together in glorious dialogue.

Denson spent the first 18 months of the pandemic keeping the California Jazz Conservatory running online as dean of instruction. Though two years had elapsed between the trio's last tour and regrouping to record *Finding Light*, they picked up where they left off, exploring a "sound that evolved because we did a lot of playing and travelling together in 2019 and 2020," Denson said. "Each time we played together the band kept growing and our sound and direction evolved. Our connection kept intensifying."

That intensity is evident throughout *Finding Light*. The trio's new music reflects both the unbridled joy of gathering together again and the small pleasures (particularly the fur-bearing variety) that eased the surreal passage of pandemic time. The album opens with Denson's "**Daily Jubilee of Dancing Herbie D.**" an odd-meter tune inspired by his miniature schnauzer, a smart little dog with a big personality. **Bouncing with an irresistible groove in the vicinity of New Orleans**, it's an invitation for an outdoor romp written with Blade and Pilon in mind.

Denson's title track is a sinuous, singing melody and an imperative. The dance between his bass and Blade's brushes is so deft and exquisite that the tune builds tension to a delicious peak while maintaining an almost whispered dynamic. When Pilon reenters the conversation, "Finding Light" answers its own call. The light we need is embodied in the musical connection. Denson says, "With this tune, I really wanted to encapsulate a sense of hope – a sense of finding much need light amidst these dark times we've all been living through."

It's only kind of a coincidence that Pilon's first tune is also a paean to his pooch. "**This Way Cooky**" is a slyly grooving number "inspired by some of the funk music I rediscovered during the pandemic," he said, thinking particularly of Blade's work with Joshua Redman. With its fierce determination and sinewy rhythmic feel, Cooky is clearly a handful. "On walks I'm always trying to direct him, 'this way, Cooky,' and he never goes the way I want," Pilon explains.

The trio really hit a high point on their tour in February 2020 reaching a new level of interaction and connection that is clearly evident in their [live concert videos](#) from the Freight & Salvage in Berkeley on Feb. 11, 2020. "That tour was a like a musical dream – the trio was on another level!" Denson recalls. "And then less than a month later the world went into a surreal nightmare with the onset of COVID." "**A Moment in Time**" was the first piece composed for the album and with it, Denson paints a sonic surrealist landscape of the unknown – inspired by the novelty of the imposed silence and naivety that it would only last a few weeks. "In those first three weeks of the shelter-in-place, like everyone, I was somewhat in shock, and had no idea it would last for such a long time. Sitting alone in my home studio I kept hearing Romain and Brian in my head from our tour in February and their sound mixed with the silence of the world around me and the feelings of bewilderment brought this piece clearly into focus for me."

Denson transformed his song "**Wishing Well**," which he recorded with his vocals on his 2016 album *Concentric Circles*, into a mysterious instrumental ballad that fits snugly into the trio's exploratory mission. His piece "**The Tipster**" is a briskly swinging tune inspired by a frisky feline companion who long kept his mother company, and passed away this past fall. Swing is central to Denson's musical identity, "and who can swing

like Brian?" he says. "I could hear the melody and like 'Finding Light,' there's all this intricate harmony, and all these rhythmic shifts, which kind of reflects Tippy's personality. He was a wild, playful guy."

Drawing on his Virginia roots, Denson improvised the bass intro to Pilon's "Terre," evoking a bluesy Americana melody and feeling. The tune itself, which means "Earth" in French, is a loving, sometimes ominous ode to our endangered planet inspired by the striking landscape Pilon and his family have inhabited since a pandemic-induced move from Paris to the Brittany coast. The album closes with a disparate pair of Pilon compositions. "Espoir," which means "hope," is a spacious anthem that evokes the search for silver linings. With its rock edge and lean beat, the track offers his distilled take on Brian Blade Fellowship, the drummer's gospel-and-folk-music inspired band. *Finding Light* concludes with "Sixto," a piece inspired by the story of Sixto Rodriguez, the musician whose astonishing story was featured in the award-winning 2012 documentary *Searching For Sugarman*. For a project that's all about breaking through darkness, the tune's stutter-stepping ascent evokes a sense of immanent, luminous possibility.

The creative sparks that kindled *Finding Light* first ignited back in 2017 when Denson joined a tour anchoring Joel Harrison's Spirit House quintet, which the guitarist/composer built around Blade. "Brian and I clicked right away," Denson says. "Immediately we were throwing the ball back and forth really quickly. As a bassist, to have a drummer I can completely react and do anything I want and he's right there throwing ideas back, well, that's not a given." Something about their chemistry prompted Denson to reach out to Pilon, an old friend from Berklee he hadn't had a chance to play with much in recent years. "He's a bad dude," Denson said. "A virtuoso player, but very sensitive and very musical—the same exact words I would use to describe Brian. It just seemed like a perfect fit."

BIOS

Jeff Denson

Born on December 20, 1976 in Arlington, Virginia, internationally renowned bassist, vocalist, composer, and educator Denson grew up in the Washington, DC area. Musically inclined, he switched from saxophone to bass and vocals in high school and went on to study music at Virginia Commonwealth University and Northern Virginia Community College, all the while freelancing regularly on the DC jazz scene. Transferring to Boston's Berklee College of Music to complete his degree, he co-founded the trio Minsarah, touring and recording with the band for 15 years. Via the trio he also became an accompanist for legendary saxophonist Lee Konitz, a relationship that spanned four albums and more than a dozen years. In the meantime, Denson completed a master's degree at Florida State University and a DMA at UC San Diego. Denson relocated to the San Francisco Bay Area in 2011 to become a professor at the California Jazz Conservatory, where he now serves as Dean of Instruction. He released his first solo project, *Secret World*, in 2012 and has earned wide critical acclaim for his performances and recordings. **DownBeat magazine cited Denson's "considerable gifts as an improviser, interpreter and sonic trailblazer..." earning him spots for the last four years on the DownBeat Rising Star Poll for Bassist, Male Vocalist and winning the Electric Bass category in 2021.** Germany's *Jazz Podium* magazine noted that "Denson is breaking new ground...(he is) one of the leading bassists of contemporary jazz." Denson has released 16 albums as a leader or co-leader and performs widely with his own groups as well as with the San Francisco String Trio (Denson, guitarist Mimi Fox and violinist Mads Tolling), among others and has worked with some of the brightest stars in jazz such as Joe Lovano, Chris Potter, Edward Simon, Mike Clark, Omar Hakim, Rachel Z, Walter Smith III, Warren Wolf, Jane Ira Bloom, Cuong Vu, Ralph Alessi, Dayna Stephens, and many more.

Denson has brought his many pursuits under one umbrella with Ridgeway Arts, a nonprofit designed to enhance and fortify the Bay Area scene, and to make a strong contribution to the national landscape of jazz and the arts in general through a four-pronged plan of expression, education, presenting and documentation. The label has become an essential conduit to an

international cast of musicians, including pianist Edward Simon, and the portal to Denson's multifarious musical imagination. **Commissioned by the Portola Vineyards Summer Jazz Festival, his next project involves recording an ambitious new work featuring Chinese pipa master Wu Man, reed legend Paul McCandless, and drum great Gerald Cleaver.**

Romain Pilon

Described by Jazzwise as "a brilliant improviser," French guitarist and composer Romain Pilon has earned a glowing reputation in the jazz guitar world. He took up the instrument at 10, exploring all kinds of music throughout high school before going to conservatory in his native France and eventually earning a scholarship to Berklee College of Music in Boston. After his US sojourn (where he won three awards and was chosen with his group to open for Pat Metheny out of 1,000 guitar students) he lived between Paris and New York City, performing with some of the world's greatest improvising musicians. Pilon has recorded three albums as a co-leader and five as a leader: NY3, Colorfield, The Magic Eye, Copper and the most recently, *Falling Grace*, collaborating with some of the world's top musicians: Ben Wendel, Walter Smith III, Jeff Ballard, Seamus Blake...His talent both as an improviser and composer has earned him kudos in the international press as one of France's standout jazz artists. **Jazz journalist and curator Vincent Bessieres wrote, "Romain is a guitarist whose flow of imagination sets high standards, and whose guitar tone is one of the most elegant around..." His ability to play all forms of jazz, from swing and bebop to modern and avant-garde, makes him an in-demand sideman.** In addition to his performing and recording career, Pilon is an esteemed pedagogue. He's given masterclasses in France, the US, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Japan, Germany, Slovenia, Malta... Over the years he has taught hundreds of private students, many of them now respected musicians in their own right.

Brian Blade

Brian Blade was born and raised in Shreveport, Louisiana. **The first music he experienced was gospel and praise songs** at the Zion Baptist Church where his father, Brady L. Blade, Sr., has been Pastor since 1961. In elementary school, music appreciation classes were an important part of his development, and at age nine he began playing the violin. Inspired by his older brother, Brady L. Blade, Jr., who had been the drummer at Zion Baptist Church, Brian shifted his focus to the drums throughout middle and high school. **During high school, while studying with Dorsey Summerfield, Jr., Brian began listening to the music of John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Art Blakey, Thelonious Monk, Elvin Jones and Joni Mitchell.** In 1988, at the age of 18, he moved to New Orleans to attend Loyola University. Over the next five years, he was able to study and play with many of the master musicians living in New Orleans, including Johnny Vidacovich, Ellis Marsalis, Steve Masakowski, Bill Huntington, Mike Pelleria, John Mahoney, George French, Emile Vinette, Germaine Bazzle, David Lee, Jr., Alvin Red Tyler, Tony Dagradi, and Harold Battiste. **In 1997, Blade formed The Fellowship Band with pianist Jon Cowherd, releasing their self-titled debut album in 1998, *Perceptual* in 2000, *Season of Changes* in 2008, *Landmarks* in 2014, and *Body and Shadow* in 2017, all on Blue Note Records.** While continuing to work with The Fellowship Band, **Blade has been a member of the Wayne Shorter quartet since 2000.** He has recorded with Daniel Lanois, Joni Mitchell, Kenny Garrett, Ellis Marsalis, Marianne Faithfull, Norah Jones, Emmylou Harris and Bob Dylan, among many others. In 2009, Blade released his first album as a singer-songwriter, *Mama Rosa*, featuring songs dedicated to his grandmother and family, written from experiences about his life so far.

Jeffdenson.com



National / International Radio Campaigns
KATE SMITH PROMOTIONS

814.482.0010

www.katesmithpromotions.com

katesmithpromotions.kate@gmail.com

katesmithpromotions.richard@gmail.com