



PIROUET
PRESSE INFORMATION

PIROUET Records

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Bill Carrothers **Joy Spring**

VÖ: 26. März 2010

Pirouet Records · PIT3046

Vertrieb Deutschland: MVH/Medien Vertrieb Heinzelmann
Vertrieb Schweiz: Musikvertrieb
Vertrieb Österreich: Extraplatte

Bill Carrothers piano
Drew Gress bass
Bill Stewart drums

1. Junior's Arrival 6:07
2. Joy Spring 4:55
3. Jacqui 6:21
4. Gerkin for Perkin 3:26
5. Delilah 6:16
6. Gertrude's Bounce 7:02
7. Jordy 7:46
8. Daahoud 5:39
9. Time 6:34
10. Powell's Prances 4:09
11. Tiny Capers 3:35
12. I Remember Clifford 5:02

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Marty Cook **about Bill Carrothers** **and *Joy Spring***

Question: how can a jazz pianist who lives “forty miles from the nearest grocery store” in Michigan’s upper peninsula survive and flourish in the cutthroat music business? Answer: either he’s the son of the CO of Columbia Records, or he is a very special sort of player. In pianist Bill Carrother’s case, it’s the latter. Now living outside the paradoxically named town of Mass City, Michigan, (population 479), Carrothers has been outside the mainstream for over a decade, turning his back on the city centers that have historically defined the creative and cultural evolution of jazz, as well as controlled a musician’s commercial success or failure. And yet, at 45, Carrothers has somehow maintained his balance on the cutting edge of the music.

Born and raised in Excelsior, Minnesota, a small city west of Minneapolis, Carrothers began taking piano lessons from his church organist “... because she was around. She used to play everything through first, and I could play it back so I got used to playing by ear instead of really learning how to read.” He started playing gigs “when I was 15 ... with a bunch of crusty old world war two vets who played this music—you know, standards, so you’d get up on the bandstand and as long as you kept showing up they’d let you play. They’d click off a tune, and if you didn’t know it you’d just have to sit there and figure it out. That doesn’t happen much anymore, which is unfortunate.”

Carrothers went to North Texas State for a year, but found the jazz department stultifying, and gravitated towards the classic music department because ... “there was a classical piano teacher who was also and incredible jazz player. He was the first guy who was like, ‘Wait a minute, we’re



talking about the same thing here. We’re talking about moving people, and about art. How do we get there.’ Important aspects of jazz can’t be taught—you learn them along the way by playing them yourself. You draw from whatever works for you, whatever you love.”

Bill then went to the University of Minnesota where he lasted four weeks before he realized it wasn’t for him. But there were some things gained: he met his future wife, and “I got half of my money back—kept the girl, kept the money.” In 1988 Carrothers took a trip to New York City to visit a friend. He was going to stay a month and ended up spending five years. They were years that matured him as a musician, and forged many of the musical friendships that continue to this day. One such friendship was with drummer Bill Stewart, but as Carrothers recounts, “The first time we played together it actually didn’t go that well. I think it was in ‘89 or ‘90; Stewart must have been 18 or 19 and he was already really happening. I wasn’t ready for him when he first came over to play he was much further ahead than I was. When he left the house I thought, Wow, I’ve got some work to do. It took me about a year, year and a half of playing, I had him back over, and we’ve been playing together ever since.” Up until now this has resulted in two albums for Blue Note with Stewart’s group, and several CDs under Carrothers’ name, including a superb trio album with Gary Peacock on bass that was recorded in 1992 and released on Pirouet in 2008 (*Home Row*). ▶





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▶ Bill Carrothers left New York because “I can’t live in big cities. Physically and emotionally it doesn’t work for me—I have to have countryside and trees and lots of space. There are way too many people in NY—you feel like your bubble is being constantly invaded.” After moving back to Minnesota, and a couple of years in Woodstock, N.Y. before he realized it was just too far from the Apple, Carrothers decided to make a complete break with the cities, and he and his wife settled in Mass City, Michigan.

Why does a pianist decide to do a trio record of music played by a trumpeter who has been dead for some 55 years? Well, it isn’t just any trumpeter. With his luxurious crystal-clear sound, virtuoso technique, and sophisticated harmonic concepts, Clifford Brown was a major influence on the next generations of trumpeters from Booker Little, Lee Morgan, Donald Byrd, and Freddie Hubbard, through to Woody Shaw, Valery Ponomarev, and Winton Marsalis. And Clifford’s music was at home in the Carrothers house: “Clifford was some of the first jazz music that I listened to. My Dad was into him and he was one of the people I gravitated to. I had a piano teacher, Bobby Peterson—I studied with him for about a year and a half from around 14 to 15 and a half. We’d get together, listen to records, then he would play the trumpet—he was also a good trumpet and soprano player—and I’d play the piano—we’d play duets and then we would listen to

the music, and one of the people he was big on was Clifford. He was such a master—his lines are all so perfectly delineated, everything is so clear. I’ve always loved the arrangements, and the way the band plays—Sonny Rollins and Harold Land. That music meant a lot to me—I listened to it constantly when I was 16 and 17. I’ve always wanted to go back to it in a trio context and try to say something a little different with it, rather than get a trumpet player and make a tribute record; try to make it a little bit my own. I went through my old MRC LP’s: Brown and Roach, Roach and Company, Live at Basin Street, and decided which are the tunes where I have something to say, that I know what they’re talking about, and those were the ones I chose. I picked stuff that I thought was fat enough, malleable enough that I could do something with it. Some of the arrangements were pretty much like the original recordings. On *Powell’s Prances* the only thing that has changed are the harmonic underpinnings. On *Jacqui*, and *Gertrude’s Bounce*, the arrangements are basically the same; we just changed the feel, the general ambience.

About choosing playing partners and playing and recording, Bill says, “I first worked with Drew Gress and Bill Stewart together on my record *Armistice 1918* some 5 years ago. They fit really well together, and they fit with what I’m doing. What’s more important than what we end up with is picking the guys that are right for the music. I might talk about the music being in a certain feeling or general shape, but I don’t like to tell players what they should do. I like to keep it open, and I rely on the players to make me sound better than I am. I let them do whatever they want to do. What helps for me is that I go into the studio without any expectations. Divorce myself from what I think I’m trying to get to and just go with what is. You go in the studio to make one kind of record and you come out with a totally different kind of record, and I like that. That makes it easier. Almost every record I’ve made is not the record I set out to make.” ▶





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- ▶ After touring Italy in January 2009, the trio went into Pirouet's Munich studio and recorded *Joy Spring*. Bill Carrothers comments on the music, "I guess it's unseemly to like what you do but I like what we did on this CD. We played differently every night on tour, and the recording is representative."

On *Junior's Arrival* Carrothers treats the theme in much the same way as the Brownie original, but then all bets are off as he zigs when you expect him to zag, ducking in and out of the tempo and the changes while Gress's and Stewart's solid underpinning keep his feet on the ground .

Carrothers transforms Brown's bright, upbeat *Joy Spring* into a slow, dark and haunting elegy of loss and regret—"Sometimes I like to take b-bop tunes and slow them down, turn them into hymns. There are times with bop that all those notes seem to go flying by. That can be a nice feeling, but you can take those tunes and slow them down, kind of like an exploded view of some technical diagram, and see all that little stuff inside. Shirley Horn plays *Joy Spring*; that's my reference point. I love playing like that. It changed my life when I heard her at the Vanguard one night. My future wife, who is a singer, dragged me down there. She wanted to hear Horn. Frankly I was a little bummed to be going. I didn't have much money and I never went to the Vanguard because it was too expensive. I had always been pretty much a flame thrower as

a player. Now I've got to go hear this singer. Amazingly, I didn't even know who she was. And it changed my life. She was drunk; she'd play four A sections in a row, she forgot the lyrics, sang the wrong lyrics, and it was amazing. She was great. I sat there and practically cried the whole night – I thought—so that's how you do it! So that's where that feel, that kind of thing comes from."

Carrothers says of *Jacqui*, "It's a fun tune. I've always loved the arrangement, and when we started the tour Drew and Bill put a really hip thing on it, so it was a really fun thing to play." Carrothers chords it darker than the original, with more of an edge, and a "twilight zone" ending.

Bill: "I've wanted to record *Gerkin for Perkin* for a long time. I've been playing it for years—it's a fast rollicking blues." ... and incredible interplay between Bill and Bill as Gress holds down the form.

"*Delilah* is the tune where I learned to get into that slow exotic sound, with the drums being played with mallets—I've always loved that." The Victor Young composition was written for the 1949 movie *Sampson and Delilah*, and I think both Brown and DeMille would have been delighted by this rendition.

"*Gertrude's Bounce* always sounds like Christmas to me. It should have sleigh bells. I love the feel of the piece. When I was fifteen I used to bounce around the house listening to it. We put a little bit of a different spin on it." Carrothers takes it slower than the original, and adds a taste of melancholy.

Jordu—"We just sort of played this one for fun. I hadn't planned to do it, but I love that dirty ugly kind of grind." I commented, "It's not a march, it's a slog"—and Bill replied, "Yah, it's like marching in mud."

Carrothers admitted that "*Daahoud* was the hardest one for me. I don't like to do a lot of takes. Normally I do at the most two takes of a song, but with *Daahoud* we had to do three or four. It's a hard melody for me to play. It doesn't lay on the piano well. And we couldn't quite get the feel. Here's a ▶





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▶ up and said nothing it would have been much better. I finally ended up just telling Bill and Drew to play whatever they wanted, and we ended up getting it.”

Bill enthused, “I love *Time*. I don’t know anybody else that has recorded that tune. I can’t believe it! Someone told me Sam Rivers recorded it. I had to have it in there because it’s such an amazing piece.”

“We play *Powell’s Prances* super fast. That’s probably the one we play closest to the original. The harmony at the end is what separates it from the Clifford’s version. I can still sing Clifford’s solo.” There’s a rip-tide affect in Carrother’s playing that pulls the listener out into deep water, and then places an impressionistic undercurrent to Stewart’s solo.

Carrothers admits that *Tiny Capers* is the one I hadn’t listen to as a kid. I’m surprised that some of these tunes aren’t played more often. But then pieces that aren’t played much give you a little more freedom, and you get to play musical historian. On my historical projects I’ve found a lot of great old tunes that nobody plays. It’s like panning for gold. You find this little piece, and you say wow, nobody’s found that one. And I like ghosts ...”

“We did *I Remember Clifford* because I love the tune. I wanted to keep it short. It’s nice to end records with a kiss rather than a big finish. And it fits into the idea that this is in a sense a eulogy to Clifford. This recording is for my dad. He loved Clifford Brown. He got to hear Clifford live. He’s the lucky one. He got to hear all that stuff—Chet Baker and Gerry Mulligan in wool suits standing behind the bar playing at Birdland; he sat five feet from Art Tatum and got to watch him play night after night. One night he’s sitting there and he looks over and there’s Duke Ellington having dinner with some gorgeous girl. Why can’t I just have his life, just go back ... “

I came to the project knowing Bill Carrothers only as a name, and after over a month of listening to his music I’ve become a fan—every time I put on a CD of Bill’s I hear something new —no matter how many times I’ve already listened to the music. Carrothers has a penchant for off-the-wall musical quotes, asides, and seeming non-sequiturs. He lives in a musical fifth dimension in which anything is possible. With Drew Gress’s warm, clear-clean sound, bedrock time, and inspired melodic solos, and Bill Stewart’s symbiotic play and genius for astounding the listener, these are musical visions that traverse the gamut from the abstract to the particular, the familiar to the outrageous. Art in its finished form is essentially history. Great art continues to live as an organic part of the present; through some creative alchemy it remains vital and alive, changing and growing no matter how often one views or hears it. That’s what Bill Carrother’s music does for me.





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Discography on Pirouet Records

As a leader

2010 Bill Carrothers: **Joy Spring** (Bill Carrothers p, Drew Gress b, Bill Stewart dr) · *PIT3046*

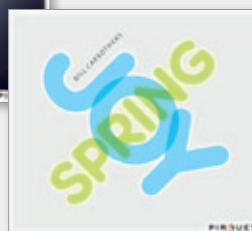
2008 Bill Carrothers: **Home Row** (Bill Carrothers p, Gary Peacock b, Bill Stewart dr) · *PIT3035*

2007 Bill Carrothers: **Keep Your Sunny Side Up** (Bill Carrothers p, Ben Street b, Ari Hoenig dr) · *PIT3021*

2005 Bill Carrothers: **I Love Paris** (Bill Carrothers p, Nicolas Thys b, Dré Pallemmaerts dr) · *PIT3012*

As a sideman

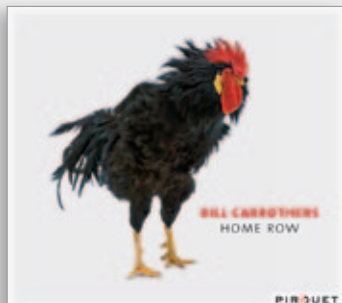
2009 Robin Verheyen: **Starbound** (Robin Verheyen ss & ts, Bill Carrothers p, Nicolas Thys b, Dré Pallemmaerts dr) · *PIT3045*





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Home Row
(2008)

Modern-jazz piano trio playing doesn't get a whole lot better than on *Home Row* (Pirouet), by the pianist Bill Carrothers. Recorded in 1992

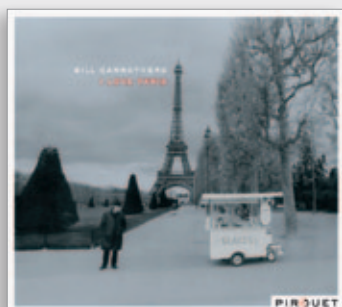
and subsequently shelved—Mr. Carrothers, who lives in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, hasn't had the luckiest or most aggressive career—the album deserves consideration as a new product, especially since some of its more vibrant songs are originals. *Hope Song*, a darkly reflective ballad, fits into that category, and so does *A Squirrel's Tale*, which takes a brighter and busier path. On those songs and a handful of well-selected others, Mr. Carrothers finds a strong chemistry with the bassist Gary Peacock and the drummer Bill Stewart, both of whom play directly to their strengths. (Nate Chinen *New York Times*, November 14th 2008)



Keep Your Sunny Side Up
(2007)

There's a vein of exuberant mischief running through the latest CD from this great pianist, evident not only in the off-beat choices (the title track,

heard in two very different versions, is one), but also in the way some are Monkishly demolished. A few standards get a refreshingly mock-heroic workover. But there are contrasts, too, in the sombre beauty of *Roses Blue*, Carrothers's *Church of the Open Air*, the swinging *I Can't Begin to Tell You* and the impressionistic opening of *The Night We Called It a Day*, which presages a superb piano solo. Carrothers and drummer Ari Hoenig—kindred spirits who egg each other on—share remarkable chemistry (*Salty Peanuts* is a spontaneous duo performance) and Ben Street completes a trio so flexible it can turn on a dime. (Ray Comiskey, *The Irish Times* 2007)



I Love Paris
(2005)

Carrothers is a harmony-rich player with an uncanny ability to see the greater potential of both hands in concert. While some pianists are fairly

linear with their right hand and eke out accompaniment with their left—and there are times when Carrothers is more linear—he has a vivid sense of larger voicings, like British pianist John Taylor, sometimes creating eight- and nine-part harmonies that move smoothly, and in ways that makes every subsequent note feel perfectly logical, yet somehow unpredictable.

Bassist Nicolas Thy and drummer Dré Pallemmaerts are intuitive players, supporting Carrothers as much as pushing him into areas of further possibility. While an underlying sense of swing pervades the entire set, the trio also takes more liberties; the title track and *Moon Love* serve as examples of how familiar tunes can be re-imagined—recognizable yes, but undeniably new as well.

With a gradually growing and significant body of work, Carrothers is clearly an artist to keep an eye on, and *I Love Paris* is another fine addition that skirts the mainstream while providing plenty of surprises for the more adventurous at heart. (John Kelman, *allaboutjazz.com* 2005)





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