



“Broadway and Beyond”

Jeff Cascaro

With his new album, the jazz-and-soul vocalist and trumpeter has once again taken a significant step forward. He covers popular classics from the American Songbook, along with old and new favorites—in a style all his own, sometimes surprising, always captivating. A very personal album.

Heard a million times: “Summertime,” “Take the A-Train,” “I Got Rhythm,” “New York, New York.” Sure, someone like Jeff Cascaro can sing them flawlessly. But there are already countless albums featuring timeless versions of these songs. So what... none of them are like this one!

Even the opening track is a small revelation. “Take The A-Train,” Billy Strayhorn’s swing anthem for the Duke Ellington Orchestra, sounds surprisingly different: soulful and laid-back, set on a different harmonic track, enriched with a powerful dash of deep soul. And yet it still conveys all the substance and emotion that make this jazz evergreen so timelessly great. “Summertime” continues this approach in an enchanting way. Among the subsequent highlights of Jeff Cascaro’s thoroughly personal soul-and-jazz approach are the rousing “Harlem” from Bill Withers’ 1971 debut album, as well as the astonishingly understated yet still groovy and intense rendition of George Benson’s “On Broadway.” There’s plenty to discover on this album. More importantly—and typical of Cascaro—it’s packed with soul. The German singer and trumpeter perhaps even brings a bit more emotion to the table here than we’ve come to expect from him.

“It was important to me to take the songs out of their usual context and put my own spin on them. To see what you can do with a song like that—but in a way that still makes sense.” Sense in relation to the original spirit. Jeff Cascaro loves these songs. He sang some of them decades ago, and most of them feel like home to him. This is also because they embody a piece of American jazz history that has become second nature to him. But one thing was out of the question for him here and now: simply recording yet another jazz song album following established patterns. “That wouldn’t have been my style. It was meant to be a tribute to the American Songbook in the broader sense—from which I’ve learned so much. But with the soul-jazz flavor that suits me.” This musical language also includes a keen feel for distinctive arrangements—an even greater challenge with songs of this historical significance. After all, the primary goal was always to do justice to the essence of the cherished originals, rather than to be original at any cost.

“Broadway and Beyond” can be seen—if only because of its title—as a concept album. Jeff Cascaro leaves such categorizations to others. Probably also because the “Beyond” is just as important to him as “Broadway.” But of course, Broadway—New York City’s most famous (and longest) street—is a preeminent symbol of everything that defines the connection between the Big Apple and New York culture, especially its musical side. “For me, though, that’s not a straitjacket—that’s why it’s ‘beyond.’”

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The myth of Broadway is a source of inspiration and a canvas for imagination. So much comes from there; it has drawn so many people to it. Of course, it goes much deeper than that.”

Speaking of ... the album's title also holds deep personal significance for Cascaro, this incredibly versatile musician and seasoned, charming performer. As he cared for his father—who was suffering from advancing dementia—during the final stages of his life, his father greeted him and his granddaughter one day at the nursing home with the words, “Well, how do you like it here on Broadway?” In his father's world—a former trumpeter himself—he was currently there. This prompted Jeff Cascaro to include “On Broadway” as an encore in his concert set. “Suddenly, he was walking through those lines.” During the long process of coming to terms with his father's death, the son delved deeper into his own childhood. “When I was young, music had saved me in a way. New York was a place of longing and refuge for me—that's where the music was!”

“Broadway and Beyond” is also an album that took shape out of a deeply personal experience. This is likely why Cascaro sounds so devotedly personal as a singer; his vocal expression and warm voice repeatedly take on an almost magical quality. The vocalist and trumpeter repeatedly emphasizes how fundamentally important the narrative aspect is to him. “As a singer, I'm first and foremost on the side of the story. You have to tell the story. Still, there should also be room for beauty or digressions.” The days when he felt compelled to show off everything he was capable of are long gone. “I'm much more relaxed when I sing; I can let it flow more. That's certainly also a result of getting older and maturing. The emotional aspect has a much more decisive significance—being in harmony with my voice and with myself.” Of course, you can also hear his trumpet, which is likewise an essential part of his artistic expression. In the perception of many, it tends to remain somewhat in the shadow of his vocal presence. For the solo parts, Cascaro—who took sole responsibility for production this time—deliberately limited himself to shorter statements that serve the songs well. And in doing so, he demonstrates his full range of sensitive artistry.

Ultimately, the new album—Cascaro's sixth since his debut exactly 20 years ago—is the result of outstanding teamwork. Bassist and co-arranger Christian van Kaphengst and Jeff Cascaro have known each other since their days together in BuJazzO. He has been associated with drummer Hans Dekker for just as long. Even youngster Billy Test, pianist and co-arranger, has been performing with Cascaro for several years now. Saxophonist Paul Heller shines as a guest artist; he, too, is a friend and longtime collaborator. “Broadway and Beyond” concludes with a pure voice-and-piano duo (Olaf Polziehn): a moving interpretation of Cole Porter's “Ev'rytime We Say Goodbye.” Earlier on the album, listeners will encounter Barry Manilow, among others. The Brooklyn native once sang of his homecoming in a jazz-tinged blues number featuring guest saxophonist Stan Getz. Jeff Cascaro and his band also give this song their own appealing twist—with a clever, light touch. And, as with the entire album: with soul.

Jeff Cascaro is available for interviews!

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