

NEW ALTERNATIVE JAZZ | PRESSKIT 2013

# THE TRIO OF OZ

OMAR HAKIM  
RACHEL Z  
SOLOMON DORSEY





# PIANIST RACHEL Z AND DRUMMER OMAR HAKIM

BRING THEIR CONSIDERABLE SKILLS AND COMBINED WEALTH OF MUSICAL EXPERIENCES TO BEAR ON THEIR COLLABORATIVE PROJECT,

## THE TRIO OF OZ.

Blending a deftly swinging jazz sensibility with their genuine love of alternative rock, the two kindred spirits put a new spin on edgy anthems like “Angry Chair” by Alice in Chains, “Sour Girl” by Stone Temple Pilots, “Lost” by Coldplay and “I Will Possess Your Heart” by Death Cab for Cutie, among others. And while some jazz-oriented interpreters of pop music often make the mistake of ‘playing at’ the music, O and Z interpret these tunes from the inside out, capturing their essence before applying creative reharmonizations, rhythmic twists and stirring improvisations.

Perhaps it comes across so organically because both Rachel and Omar are uncommonly open-minded artists, equally conversant in jazz and rock – Rachel having apprenticed with Wayne Shorter and Peter Gabriel, Hakim having played with Weather Report and Miles Davis as well as Sting, Madonna and David Bowie. Or maybe their near-telepathic connection comes from the fact that they are husband and wife. Whatever the reason, the tremendously talented couple has found a perfect musical match in The Trio of Oz.

While the two have known each other for the past 20 years and even did sessions together, they didn’t hook up romantically until 2009. As Omar recalls, “I hadn’t seen her in maybe eight or nine years. I admired her, she admired me; we just never had a chance to really hang out. So in 2009, we were both free and we just discovered there was a vibe there. We went on a date in August, 2009, and we’ve been inseparable ever since.”



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“...RACHEL Z, WHOSE NEW PIANO TRIO DOVETAILS THE DETAILED CHOREOGRAPHY OF JAZZ INTO THE FLIMSIER STRUCTURES OF POP AND ROCK. IT FEATURED THE PYROTECHNIC FLARE OF DRUMMER OMAR HAKIM - INTRODUCED, NOT INCONCEIVABLY, AS “THE BEST DRUMMER IN THE WORLD” - AND ANY MUSICIAN WOULD NEED TO BE ON THEIR METTLE SIMPLY TO KEEP UP. RACHEL Z NOT ONLY COMPLEMENTED HAKIM’S RHYTHMIC TIGER, BUT ALSO JOINED A STILL SMALL GROUP OF JAZZ MUSICIANS WHOSE CANNY ARRANGEMENTS AND TRENCHANT SWING

## REJIG INDIE POP INTO UNADULTERATED JAZZ.”

MIKE HOBART, FINANCIAL TIMES

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RATHER THAN TOURING AS THE RACHEL Z TRIO IN SUPPORT OF THE MUSIC ON I WILL POSSESS YOUR HEART, HAKIM SUGGESTED AN ALTERNATE COURSE. "BECAUSE THE MUSIC IS SO BANGING," HE TOLD RACHEL, "WHY DON'T WE JUST REBRAND IT AND CALL IT SOMETHING ELSE AND

## **JUST GO OUT AND HAVE SOME FUN."**

And so The Trio of Oz was born. They began recording sessions for their self-titled debut in April, 2010, and they have been receiving glowing reviews for their live shows with bassist Solomon Dorsey ever since. New Order's "Bizarre Love Triangle," the Morrissey-penned "There is a Light" and "Det Tar Tid" by the Swedish band Dungen are other examples of the trio's teamwork.

On the bandstand or in the studio, Omar, Rachel and Solomon engage in conversational call-and-response interactions from bar to bar within a song, in the tradition of all great piano trios over time from Erroll Garner to Ahmad Jamal to Bill Evans and beyond. But the repertoire is very different from the standard jazz piano trio. No other band on the scene today includes Wayne Shorter's "E.S.P." and "Stone Temple Pilot's "Sour Girl" in the same set, and can cover both songs with such integrity and authenticity. Just as Miles Davis covered popular tunes of the day back in the 1950s like "Surrey with the Fringe on Top" and "Someday My Prince Will Come" and John Coltrane interpreted "My Favorite Things" and "Chim-Chim-Cheree" in the 1960s, so too are The Trio Of Oz putting their stamp on pop tunes of their time.

"I think what gives us an edge is the fact that we do play rock music," says Hakim. "And when we're playing rock we're not jazz musicians who are trying to play rock. We are playing rock! But at the same time, both of us are steeped in jazz. I think that's another reason why Rachel's concept was a good fit for me. I was able to give it a shape that comes from playing rock but growing up in the jazz tradition. I could blend things differently from a guy who really didn't grow up playing rock on drums, let alone playing rock in front of 50,000 people. So now when I hear a Coldplay song, I'm listening to it like a rock drummer but when I hear Rachel's arrangement, I'm framing it as a jazz drummer. So it's an interesting blend." Adds Rachel, "We really love this music, so when we play it, we have a respect for it that I think is very useful."

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## **"OMAR HAKIM IS AN EXTRAORDINARILY FLUENT MUSICIAN; HE JUST HAPPENS TO HAVE CHOSEN TO DEMONSTRATE THIS ON THE DRUMS."**

WITHOUT DOMINATING OR ADOPTING THE LEADER'S MANTLE, THE MAN WHOSE DRUMMING CREDITS INCLUDE MILES DAVIS, STING AND MADONNA INFUSED THIS GIG WITH PERCUSSIVE MUSICALITY, LENDING CRISP, BEAUTIFULLY WEIGHTED DIRECTION AND EASING BACK IN SUPPORT WHEN APPROPRIATE AND RENDERING THE OFTEN DREADED DRUM SOLO AS AN EXHILARATING COMPOSITION."

*ROB ADAMS, THE HERALD SCOTLAND*

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**RACHEL'S CLASSICAL UPBRINGING** – her mother was an opera singer and she began voice lessons herself at an early age -- was interrupted by her immersion in jazz as a teenager. At age 15, she went to a summer session at the Berklee College of Music and later studied with pianists Joanne Brackeen and Richie Beirach, followed by jazz studies at the New England Conservatory. She subsequently landed gigs with Mike Mainieri's Steps Ahead in 1990 and the Al Di Meola group in 1992 before apprenticing with master composer Wayne Shorter. Her tenure in Peter Gabriel's band during his Growing Up tours from 2002 to 2006 flung open the door to the rock world, and she's been at the forefront of blending alternative rock and jazz ever since in her own trio.

**OMAR'S ROOTS** are strictly in jazz. His father Hasan Hakim was a trombonist who played with such jazz legends as Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Louis Armstrong and often brought his young son along with him to gigs (even allowing him to sit in at the age of 10). Growing up in Jamaica, Queens with such other musically-inclined friends as bassist Marcus Miller, keyboardist Bernard Wright, trumpeter Tom Browne and drummer Lenny White and later attending the High School of Music and Art in Manhattan put Omar on a track toward a career in music. His big break came when he joined the premier fusion group Weather Report in 1982. He subsequently ventured into the pop realm by touring and recording with superstars like Sting, Madonna and David Bowie while also appearing on albums by Mick Jagger (1987's *Primitive Cool*), Dire Straits (1985's *Brothers in Arms*, 1988's *Money for Nothing*), Mariah Carey (1990's *Mariah Carey*) and Michael Jackson (1995's *HIStory*).



## "THE NORTH AMERICAN DEBUT OF THIS STUNNING NEW BAND

WITH DRUMMER OMAR HAKIM, PIANIST RACHEL Z AND BASSIST SOLOMON DORSEY. YOU'LL HEAR AN ORIGINAL DROPPED IN HERE AND THERE, AND SOMETHING BY NICOLAZZO'S OLD BOSS WAYNE SHORTER, BUT THIS IS PRINCIPALLY A CHANCE TO PUT A TERRIFIC JAZZ TWIST ON ROCK MUSIC THAT HAS TOUCHED THE PLAYERS DEEPLY - WITH A SONGBOOK THAT STRETCHES FROM ALICE IN CHAINS TO COLDPLAY, DEPECHE MODE, DUNGEN, POLICE AND STONE TEMPLE PILOTS. THE WAY THEY STRETCHED "KING OF PAIN" AND "ANGRY CHAIR" WAS FASCINATING."

*KEN FRANKLING, ALL ABOUT JAZZ*





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## “WITTY, ORIGINAL, FOCUSED, AND A FORMIDABLE

EXPONENT OF A POST-HERBIE HANCOCK/MCCOY TYNER STYLE MEETS THE BAD PLUS, Z MAKES A CHARISMATIC ROLE MODEL... THE PAIRING OF Z AND HAKIM TURNS UP THE INTENSITY AND THE PIANO VIRTUOSITY MORE. COLDPLAY'S SOUR GIRL HIGHLIGHTED THE LEADER'S LONG-LINED INGENUITY IN ITS EPISODES OF CLEAR SPACE, THE POLICE'S KING OF PAIN UNFOLDED OVER SOFTLY TICKING FUNK, WAYNE SHORTER'S NEFERTITI WAS A TOUR DE FORCE OF SKIMMING SWING, AND IN MORE LYRICAL PASSAGES Z REVEALED A SYMMETRICALLY CLASSICAL TOUCH. "

*JOHN FORDAM, THE GUARDIAN*

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During her years of intensive woodshedding at the New England Conservatory, Rachel was a self-described jazz purist. As she recalls, “The only non-jazz groups I really liked were Steely Dan, Yes and the Police. My attitude toward pop then was, ‘It’s all commercial bs!’ So I didn’t really allow myself to get into rock music then.”

A turning point for her came in 1995 while working on Wayne Shorter’s Grammy Award-winning *High Life* album. “After that I started getting into bands like Depeche Mode, Coldplay and U2. I was a little late on Kurt Cobain and Nirvana, Courtney Love, Alice in Chains. The Killers and New Order came much later. I basically caught myself up on that whole English rock scene and the alt rock scene, and I found myself kind of attracted to goth rock. So I had the concept to kind of be a goth jazz band. And that’s why I tend to pick songs that are more hard-edged.”

On Coldplay’s “Lost” she uses Shorter’s style of non-functional harmony. On Death Cab for Cutie’s “I Will Possess Your Heart,” she incorporates a bit of Freddie Hubbard’s “Red Clay” while on the Morrissey song “There’s a Light,” she uses “Giant Steps” kind of changes. Says Rachel, “It’s really important to me to have blowing changes on these tunes that are as challenging as Wayne Shorter’s ‘E.S.P.’, which is another reason why we keep that song in our live sets. It’s a kind tune that really keeps you on your toes, and it also inspires people who don’t know anything about jazz to go find out more about Wayne Shorter.”

She is also quick to point out that the lyrical content of some of these alternative rock pieces were particularly inspiring to her. “Tunes like ‘Angry Chair’ and The Killers’ ‘When You Were Young’ are really important to me. ‘Angry Chair’ is a really dark song but the bridge is all about there’s light, there’s hope. And shortly after he wrote that tune, the singer committed suicide. And ‘When You Were Young’ is a really heavy song about dreams and love and being disillusioned. The Stone Temple Pilots song ‘Sour Girl’ has really important lyrics to me. And ‘Bizarre Love Triangle’ has really intense lyrics that Omar and I really like. ‘There Is A Light’ is a dark, twisted lyric about if a double decker bus crashes into us, to die by your side is a wonderful way to die. And the lyrical content of these songs really plays into the arrangement for both of us. Because Omar will play a beat that goes with the feeling. And we both have such a conversational thing going on through all of these songs.” Adds Omar, “Oh, it’s incredible, man! It’s this weird, magical thing that happens when we play together. It’s almost like it taps you on the shoulder in a way,

## HERE IT IS, HERE’S THE MAGIC.”



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"THE PIANO PLAYING IS FRESH, EXCITING, IRREVERENT AND ADVENTUROUS THROUGHOUT, AND THE RHYTHM SECTION CEASELESSLY BOLD AND BRAVE...THIS IS EXCITING MODERN JAZZ, THE SORT THAT FULFILLS THE FORM'S DICTUM TO CHANGE OR FADE AWAY. IT ALSO IS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLE OF ROCK SONGS REIMAGINED AS JAZZ THIS SIDE OF BRAD MEHLDAU'S RADIOHEAD COVERS. OUTSTANDING."

*BUFFALO NEWS JEFF MIERS*

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"... JAM-LADEN JAZZ ALBUM CHOCK FULL OF EMOTION AND LIFE. SOME OF THE JAMS CAPTURED HERE TAKE YOU THROUGH MORE TWISTS AND TURNS THAN THE AVERAGE FEATURE-LENGTH MOVIE:

**TENSION THAT GIVES WAY TO WISTFUL SWEETNESS OR JUMP-IN-THE-AIR JOY,** WITH ENOUGH PEAKS AND DIPS AND DRIFTS AND GLIDES TO HOOK YOU IN AND MAKE YOU WANT TO FIND OUT JUST WHERE THE THING IS GOING NEXT...SECONDS INTO THE ALBUM YOU CAN'T HELP BUT BE IMPRESSED WITH THE SOUND. DRUMMER OMAR HAKIM (WHO'S KEPT THE BEAT FOR EVERYONE FROM MILES DAVIS AND WEATHER REPORT TO BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND STING) HANDLED THE ENGINEERING AND MIXING FOR THE ALBUM AND SIMPLY NAILED THE TRIO'S VIBE. THE RESULT IS AN ALBUM THAT FEELS CRISP, IMMEDIATE, AND RIGHT THERE..."

*BRIAN ROBBINS, GLIDEMAGAZINE.COM*

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