



Album Interview

Scott Kinsey We Speak Luniwaz

Whirlwind Recordings WR4743 (CD) ★★★

Scott Kinsey (ky, p, vocoder), Katisse Buckingham (ts, ss, f), Hadrien Feraud (b), Gergö Borlai (d), plus guests including Bobby Thomas Jr. (perc), Arto Tunçboyacıyan (perc, v) and Jimmy Haslip (b). Rec. 2019

Scott Kinsey got to know Joe Zawinul in the last years of his life and was namechecked as an 'Assistant to the Production' on Zawinul's *Faces & Places* (ESC). Fascinated by Zawinul's distinctive approach to music, he tried to "reverse engineer" his style, saying, "Anyone who knows Zawinul's music realises he didn't play licks or phrases that one can simply copy and regurgitate. What Joe did was to create his own personal language that was always fresh and in the moment", hence the album's title (*Luniwaz* being Zawinul backwards). Also a member of the Zawinul Legacy Band, Kinsey is well placed to tip his hat to Zawinul's amazing legacy which has become somewhat overlooked as acoustic jazz has set out its stall as the 'real jazz'. Turf wars aside, this is a very well-crafted album of Zawinul compositions – 'Cucumber Slumber', 'Black Market', 'Fast City' and more – plus Wayne Shorter's 'Port of Entry' and two Kinsey compositions that are brought to life in a way that captures the essence of Weather Report... and Scott Kinsey.

Jazzwise spoke to Scott Kinsey:

To me jazz education has certainly raised the bar technically and harmonically, but compositionally I don't feel it has made the same advances. What are your thoughts and what lessons does Zawinul hold for today?

Yes, I notice this when I'm subbing for Vince Mendoza's classes at USC. The students often bring in some very complex and advanced compositions, but they're almost never memorable. More is not always better and often complex isn't either. Striking a balance is key and that's something that Joe did very naturally. For music to be meaningful it should tell a story

Melody has an enormous role in Zawinul compositions; they are singable or hummable – again your thoughts?

If a melody is hummable, there's a good chance it will be much more memorable than a complex bebop line, for instance. Joe only cared if music expressed something. So if you are going to compose something – what's it about? What story are you telling? I think these are things to think about. One way for keyboard students to work on this might be to record while you improvise melodically. Sing while you improvise to help connect what's in your head with your hands. Then review what you've got. Keep doing this and you'll eventually come up with compositional ideas you may have otherwise never thought of.

It's remarkable how you have got inside Zawinul's musical world and captured the spirit of Weather Report. But Joe also had formidable rhythmic drive, and perhaps this is a little understated on *Luniwaz*?

I think this record is rhythmically strong, but maybe in a different way than Joe – I still want this to sound like a Scott Kinsey record, filtering his incredible music and spirit through my own lens. I think it's important to be reverent, when appropriate, while still being myself and putting my own rhythmic or harmonic thoughts into the music. **Stuart Nicholson**