

Oscar Peterson

Con Alma: The Oscar Peterson Trio – Live in Lugano, 1964

Mack Avenue Records

MAC1207

Album credits

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CD/digital track listing

- 1. **Waltz for Debby** 7:22
- 2. **My One and Only Love** 6:03
- 3. **Blues for My Landlady** 11:01
- 4. **Con Alma** 6:26
- 5. **I Could Write a Book** 7:38
- 6. **It Ain't Necessarily So** 5:19

LP track listing

- SIDE A
- Waltz for Debby** 7:22
- My One and Only Love** 6:03
- I Could Write a Book** 7:38
- SIDE B
- Blues for My Landlady** 11:01
- Con Alma** 6:26
- It Ain't Necessarily So** 5:19

Oscar Peterson – piano
Ray Brown – bass
Ed Thigpen – drums

Producer: **Kelly Peterson**

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1. **Waltz for Debby** 7:22

Bill Evans • Folkways Music Publishers Inc/TRO Essex Music Group (BMI)

2. **My One and Only Love** 6:03

Robert Mellon, Guy Wood • Colgems EMI Music Inc./Sony/ATV Music Publishing, Warock Corporation/Kobalt Music Publishing Inc. (ASCAP)

3. **Blues for My Landlady** 11:01

Oscar Peterson • Tomi Music Company/Sony Music Publishing (BMI)

4. **Con Alma** 6:26

Dizzy Gillespie • Dizzy Music Corporation/Sony/ATV Music Publishing (ASCAP)

5. **I Could Write a Book** 7:38

Lorenz Hart, Richard Rodgers • Lorenz Hart Publishing Company/WC Music Corp, Williamson Music Co/Concord Music (ASCAP)

6. **It Ain't Necessarily So** 5:19

George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin, Dorothy Heyward, DuBose Heyward • DuBose and Dorothy Heyward Memorial Fund Pub/Downtown DLJ Songs, Frankie G. Songs/Downtown DLJ Songs, Nokawi Music/Raleigh Music Publishing LLC, Ira Gershwin Music/WC Music Corp. (ASCAP)

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Producer: **Kelly Peterson**
Executive Producer: **Gretchen Valade**
Senior Director of A+R: **Will Wakefield**
Manager, Creative Services + Production: **Romelle Canonizado**
Product Manager: **Matthew Jurasek**

Art Direction + Design: **Timothy Cobb** • timothycobb.co
Photos: Oscar Peterson/Courtesy of the Estate

Recorded at **Teatro Apollo**, Lugano, Switzerland by RSI Radiotelevisione svizzera May 26, 1964
Mixing and Mastering Engineer: **Blaise Favre** – Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland • www.vietnet.tv

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Special Thanks:

Eternal thanks must always go first to Oscar, and next to this trio – Oscar, Ray Brown and Ed Thigpen – for the magic their musical union creates.

Boundless thanks to Blaise Favre, Jacques Muyal, Christian McBride, Jeff Hamilton, Cecilia Brown, Navin Khanna, Benny Green, Denise Thigpen, John Clayton, Sven van der Klaauw, Safwan Javed, Gayle Villeneuve, Peter Andreana, Michael Dawson, Darren McMullin, Katharine Ness, Eleonora Maraffi, and Etienne Bujard.

I'm grateful (and always pinching myself!) for the great good fortune I have in working with the Mack Avenue team: Denny Stilwell, Matthew Jurasek, Will Wakefield, Jodi Tack, Lucille Hunt, Toni Gibson, Adam Zelinka, Casey Conroy, Darrell Garrett, Romelle Canonizado, Sydney Hill, James Lockwood, Shelby Withun, and all the rest of this marvelous group of people. Thank you all for your dedication, your hard work, your creative spirits, your enthusiasm, your energy and your friendship. I appreciate you more every day, and continually rejoice in the serendipity that brought us together. Oscar's recorded legacy is in the best hands.

Thank you to my closest friends and my family for so, so much, including for always being encouraging. GL, RC & MC, LL, LN, HL, PY, JP, RA, MS, MM, MR, JS, EP, JQW, JG & MG & the sextet: I love you! To DMcG, thank you. Always love and thanks to Céline Olivia. Don't ever forget ILYAMGFFAANMWGB.

And again to Oscar – forty-two years ago you changed my life forever. No matter how many years we have, there is never enough time. Thank you for music, for memories, for more.

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Con Alma

It's a late spring evening in May 2023. I'm sitting in my living room as the azure sky gradually turns to golden peach, to violet, and at last to a magical midnight hue. The music playing through the speakers in my living room is the concert recording you now hold in your hands. I close my eyes and am transported back in time nearly 60 years to 1964 and a May night in Lugano, Switzerland. It was in this idyllic setting, amid the Alps and the alpine

lake, where one night in a small concert hall Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown and Ed Thigpen enthralled an audience so long ago. Although I never heard this trio perform together in person, it is easy to imagine being among the audience that night, listening to three of the greatest musicians ever playing with the harmoniousness that was their trademark.

One of the myriad joys of life with Oscar was being privy to his storytelling. He spoke often of this trio, of the hours they rehearsed, the arrangements they mastered, their shared desire and determination to be the best. What sounds almost effortless in this concert recording came from those rehearsals into the wee small hours of the morning in empty nightclubs. It came from the hours spent by Ray and Ed in their hotel rooms as they perfected playing in unity, ensuring that the trio sounded as though they were one. Whenever we were with Ray Brown, he joined in the storytelling, his face and Oscar's lighting up with delight as they reveled in the memories. Their exuberant laughter echoes in my mind still.

What a privilege it is to be able to bring this previously unheard, unreleased concert into the light. Rejoicing in hearing this trio at the height of their union – the sparkling piano under Oscar's touch, the brilliance of Ray's bass playing, and the tasteful complement, always the right touch at the right moment, of Ed's drums – I understand why so many consider this Oscar's best trio. I am also reminded of Oscar's desire to have his groups, each of them, sound like one: not as three individuals playing together, but as a single unit. Three instruments played by three musicians thinking as one. Their energy, their tremendous musicianship, their camaraderie, their joy – it all comes through in their devotion to the music, to each other, and to being the best. Their dedication to entralling their audiences, to creating memories that will last long after the last note resonates in the concert hall. And oh, what memories! It is my hope that this recording adds to your treasure trove as it has added to mine.

Happy listening!

- *Kelly Peterson, May 2023*

Ray Brown

"Well, jazz is to me, a complete lifestyle. It's bigger than a word. It's a much bigger force than just something you can say. It's something you have to feel. It's something that you have to live."

And live it he did. Putting Ray Brown's impact into words is next to impossible. As I've gotten older, I realized that as a little girl I fell in love with bass players. Uncle Ray and Uncle Niels (Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen) were two individuals whom I cherished more than can be expressed in words.

As a little girl, my love for Ray was purely based on who he was as a human being. A gentle giant with an infectious laugh that could be heard for miles, who always greeted me with a smile. He just so happened to be a bass player. Now, after years of developing my own relationships with his music and music overall, I now hear what everyone around me heard, and I share in their amazement.

Ray's sound is instantly recognizable. You can tell within mere seconds that he is the one playing, but how each person determines this depends on how you listen and what you're listening for. For me, I can tell by the sound his strings make. It's not something I can specifically describe, but prior to hearing his approach to the melody or his solo, I can hear that Ray Brown is playing because of the sound of his strings.

There will never be another Ray Brown. His legacy, firmly cemented in the jazz history books, is written and underlined in indelible ink. I've never been one to compare musicians – especially the history makers – because I don't feel it's my place. I'm not a musician – I just know what I like to listen to and I know the sounds that resonate within the deepest parts of my heart and soul. And that is something that would make Uncle Ray very happy. He wanted you to feel something when you heard him play. He left everything he had up on the bandstand every single night, and he was playing for himself as much as he was playing for us. Because as he said, jazz is a complete lifestyle.

- Céline Peterson

Jeff Hamilton Remembers Ed Thigpen

Having been in this setting, one thing I realized very quickly was that Oscar Peterson expected a high level of execution, musicality, accuracy, intensity, professionalism and good taste from his bandmates. This pretty much sums up Ed Thigpen. To add to the aforementioned, “Thag” was a master of brushes, a light touch, awareness, orchestration from the drums and knowing just the right thing to do at the right time to better serve the music.

As you'll hear on this recording, a mallet on a cowbell, sticks on rims, smooth brushes, a hot ride cymbal beat and intense solos all broadened our ears while enjoying the trio.

Lastly, it has been said by many that a jazz musician plays their personality. Mr. Thigpen was one of the kindest, giving, understanding, sensitive souls to ever walk this earth. He shares these traits with us on this recording.

- Jeff Hamilton

Drummer, Composer, Bandleader and member of the Oscar Peterson Quartet

Three Giants Doing Their Thing

Many jazz writers and musicians alike have often suggested that 1964 (along with 1959) was a peak year for jazz. It was the year that John Coltrane recorded his masterpiece *A Love Supreme*; Art Blakey was leading perhaps his most celebrated unit with Freddie Hubbard, Wayne Shorter, Curtis Fuller, Cedar Walton and Reggie Workman, that is, until Shorter left Blakey that summer to join forces with Miles Davis, forming what was to be known as the Second Great Quintet along with Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Tony Williams. Lee Morgan and Horace Silver would separately achieve the ultimate rarity in jazz - the crossover pop hit. Morgan with *The Sidewinder* and Silver with *Song For My Father*. Yes, 1964 seemed to be exciting on the jazz front.

In this context, it's important to know that Oscar Peterson's Trio with Ray Brown and Ed Thigpen was a well-oiled machine by 1964. Having traveled the entire world playing countless numbers of concerts, they were, by anyone's standards, automatic. This specific trio of Peterson, Brown and Thigpen recorded an estimated 35 albums together from 1959 to 1965 - an unbelievable level of output and prolificness. In 1964, their final year together as a trio, they released four albums: *The Oscar Peterson Trio Plays*, *Oscar Peterson Trio + One*, *Canadiana Suite* and *We Get Requests*.

This performance in Lugano, Switzerland captures the trio in peak form. As a musician, I can tell you that the atmosphere of a concert hall, the sound onstage, and most importantly, the audience, makes a significant impact on how a unit functions onstage from night to night. As professionals, we are taught to play our very best no matter the circumstances, but it sounds to me from this recording that everything was perfectly in sync - the musicians, the atmosphere, the sound, and definitely the audience.

Repertoire-wise, the songs featured here are songs which were in the trio's rotation at the time like "Waltz For Debby," "Con Alma," "My One and Only Love" and "It Ain't Necessarily So." They work up a sweat (or maybe it was just me sweating while listening!) on an intensely cookin' version of "I Could Write a Book." The "discoverer's jewel" of this recording is a never-heard-before blues called "Blues For My Landlady," named for Oscar's dear friend, Chicago pianist and vocalist Audrey Morris.

It almost feels like a moot endeavor to describe Oscar Peterson's, Ray Brown's or Ed Thigpen's playing on this recording. On every recording they made individually, and especially as a unit (one of the most celebrated in jazz history), they displayed high-level execution and greatness. This is another example of three giants doing their thing one night in 1964.

- *Christian McBride*

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Excerpt from A Jazz Odyssey, by Oscar Peterson
Courtesy of the Estate of Oscar Peterson

...and in early 1959 I called Ed Thigpen.

From the outset Ray outlined what he knew I expected from them as my rhythmical driving force. This had nothing to do with the various lines Ray and I would play together, which left spaces for Ed to punctuate and embellish, but hinged on what we call "burning time," when the soloist (in this case, of course, me) launches into his improvisation following the initial theme statement and arranged trio interplay. (The equivalent term in classical music would be the development section.) In addition to our trio rehearsals, therefore, Ray would call his own rehearsals in his or Ed's room and they would simply practice "time." They created a flexible and multi-faceted rhythmical language that they could apply to any musical statement I might make and enhance any direction I might choose. In short, they practiced "all the possibles."

Their command of different levels of pulsation was really something. For instance, on what we call the "two" choruses, where Ray would in essence be playing a two-four rhythm, Ed would employ brushes, showing his genius with every silken sweet; this would often graduate to a medium-drive four-four beat from Ray, with Ed's brushes now more forceful. Then came the gear-change into "high," when Ed switched seamlessly to sticks and ride cymbal, and we were off into the "steaming zone," which brought out in me the deepest levels of my groove playing, driven by this incomparable engine behind me.

Even on the bandstand at night Ray remained relentless in this pursuit of a musical meld. "Come on, Thags," he would exhort, "Let's tighten him up!" (Translation: "Come on Ed, let's really put it together so that he hears only one kind of time behind him.") If the rhythm section's time is not totally cohesive in this way, the soloist can easily become disrupted: if you're subconsciously aware of two different grooves, your lines of invention will start to falter. That is one ailment I am happy to say my group didn't suffer from.

This Trio grew and grew the more we got to know each other musically. Thanks to the rhythmic power and density I referred to earlier, we had no problem playing the larger festivals and auditoria. Various other musicians used to marvel at the fact that we could go out on a festival and almost immediately attain a solid groove throughout the whole performance. This came about because we left nothing to chance: we practiced

for specific venues and rehearsed dynamics as well as lines. After our sets at Chicago's London House, for example, we'd sip coffee until the staff left, and then rehearse from 4:30 to 7:00 (a.m.!). That might sound grueling; however, for us it had been integral to putting together what we felt was the best trio in jazz, and was now an accepted, even pleasurable honing process.



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