



artist bio

FLORATONE

While collaborative improvisation serves as the ethos of the jazz idiom, the projects that soar beyond the tradition—where the end product is monumentally greater than the sum of the parts—are rare indeed. They are even rarer when an artist gives creative reign to a producer to imagine and construct evocative soundscapes from source material. The first and inarguably the most potent artist-producer team that comes to mind is Miles Davis and Teo Macero during the former's early electric era. It was a collaboration that gave birth to such milestone discs as Bitches Brew and On the Corner.

In that same spirit 30 years later on Blue Note Records arrives Floratone, a brilliant, groove-heavy album by a four-member collective of the same name that features the instrumental teamwork of drummer **Matt Chamberlain** and guitarist **Bill Frisell** with producers **Tucker Martine** and **Lee Townsend** serving as equally significant imaginative forces. An 11-song collection of original soundscapes, Floratone also features a superb support team of bassist Viktor Krauss, cornetist Ron Miles and violin/viola player Eyvind Kang.

The Floratone sound is, in the words of Townsend, “futuristic roots music,” at turns jazz-vibed, swamp-funky, intensely rocking, ambiently grooved. The music drips with grit, lopes with a sweet lyricism, bursts with surprising turns, sinks in with FX'd beauty. There's an aesthetic of euphoric journey as well as a nasty get-down-and-move sensibility. While steeped in the past, Floratone is cutting-edge, teeming with rhythmically charged music for the now. The album also spotlights Frisell's multifarious guitar voice that ranges from straight jazz in the vein of Wes Montgomery (on “Swamped”) to spiky metallic rock (on the grinding number “The Future”) to sound-washed atmospherics (on “The Wanderer”).

The genesis of the unique, two-year Floratone project came when Frisell hooked up to jam with Chamberlain, best known for his expansive background in pop music, including two longtime associations with pop singer-pianist Tori Amos and the jazz-funk band Critters Buggin. The pair, both based in Seattle, had talked over the years of getting together, with the tapes rolling, to lay down free improvisations of their musical conversations. After they finally found time in their hectic schedules to commit in 2005 to a freewheeling, stream-of-consciousness session in Seattle, they turned the tapes over to Townsend and Martine, who took the raw material and sculpted songs.

“What we had to do first was capture lightning in a bottle where Bill and Matt would be able to just play free,” says Townsend, who has a long-term relationship with Frisell and has served as the guitarist's producer on many occasions. “They both have so many tools at their disposal, and they play with tons of personality. Then Tucker and I took the music, found the nuggets, moved parts around, made loops, and shaped it all into pieces that are both groove-oriented and atmospheric.”

Townsend likens the experience to a laboratory experiment. Martine, his mad scientist partner who is a producer, engineer and musician (currently playing in singer-songwriter Laura Veirs' band), seconds that assessment. “We did some extreme editing, with a lot of cutting and

pastings,” he says. “We found the strongest bits, edited them all together as compositions and made a CD of 18 tracks that we sent to Bill and Matt.”

“Lee and Tucker did an amazing job,” says Chamberlain. “Bill and I had spewed out the improvs and they made sense of them. We could have never made an album of the spontaneous session we recorded. We jammed forever, which was a blast, and then they came in and did the hard part. It turned out to be a perfect collaboration.”

Frisell agrees. “It was a convergence experience,” he says. “Just Matt and me getting together for a weird jam session was one thing, but to have Lee and Tucker come in and make something of what we had done was like synchronicity. I couldn’t help but think of Miles and Teo, the playing over and over and then sorting things out.”

In the case of *Floratone*, the “sorting out” was just stage two. From there, the project moved into new phases of development. Frisell invited Viktor Krauss to lay down the bass lines. Then the guitarist wrote horn and string parts to build the pieces with a harmonic heft. Long-time musical partners Ron Miles and Eyvind Kang were enlisted to play those parts. “At each step, it was, let’s see what’s going to happen,” says Martine. “Bill and Matt went back into the studio. Bill came up with melodies to make the compositional feel of the pieces stronger, and then Matt overdubbed new drum and percussion parts to accentuate the melody.” He adds, “It was fun to see how all these pieces on the album came about, to see how the songs unfolded.”

“It was a long budding process,” says Townsend. “It couldn’t have been more fun. It was a producer’s dream, using Bill and Matt’s explorations to create compositions.”

To Frisell, *Floratone* stands as a significant recording in his all-encompassing oeuvre. “This was one of the most extreme in-the-studio projects I’ve ever been involved in,” he says. “I’m really happy with how it came out. It feels like a band type of thing. I’ve worked with Lee and Tucker many times, with Lee as producer and Tucker as the engineer, but never like this. They made as many contributions as Matt and I did. *Floratone* is truly an album that was made with democratic decision-making at the forefront.”

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