CHRIS GREENE QUARTET’S BOUNDARY ISSUES
ATTEMPTS TO IGNORE BORDERS, FENCES
AND PURITY

BY COREY HALL

IMMEDIATELY AFTER DISCOVERING
electricity during a 1960s session at Chess Records,
Muddy Waters flipped off the Chess brothers (on GP),
and then began grooving with his new band...the
Yellowjackets.

That’s a damn lie!

True, but this musical matrimony actually happened
in tenor saxophonist Chris Greene’s mind, so he wrote a
song based off this never-happened-hit, called it “Blues
for Dr. Fenz,” brought it to his quartet, and recorded the
occasion on Boundary Issues, the ensemble’s new release.

The Chris Greene Quartet – which features pianist
Damian Espinosa, bassist Marc Piane, and drummer
Steve Corley – cut this side one week before performing
at the 2016 Chicago Jazz Festival. (“We ended up getting
a five-minute standing ovation,” Greene recalled about
the performance. “Our fans came out and completely
acted a fool, which is what I was hoping they would
do. It was a very good day.”) The album pays tribute to
those who have left lasting legacies, such as Eddie Harris,
Horace Silver, and Kenny Kirkland, while also dipping
into house music grooves and reggae.

“We’re trying to be true to ourselves artistically, but
we’re always making sure a musical lifeline, be it melody
or rhythm, is always being thrown to the audience,”
Greene said, during a recent conversation with the
JazzGram. “If they can grab onto a groove we’re
playing, we can throw some crazy stuff on top and
get away with it.”

After Greene’s house music-flavored “Here to Help,”
which he describes as attempting a “futuristic Eddie
Harris-type vibe,” the quartet interprets Horace Silver’s
“Nica’s Dream” by giving it a 70s reggae feel.

“We’re always trying to have an authentic approach
to what this music means to us, so we apply the music
of our era to jazz standards,” said Piane. “We approach
everything with deep respect for the tradition, while also
playing the music that has a deep impact on us.”

Boundry Issues actually begins with a sampled-
sound piece entitled “Prologue: The Inner Conversation.”
For 61 seconds, quotes from various voices, from Nina
Simone to Branford Marsalis to Prince, among others,
are heard at random, as the listener’s ears roam through
a crowded room.

“There’s good music, and then there’s shit!” Marsalis
is heard saying.

“Everybody wants to be a beast, until they have to
do what beasts do,” says Eric Thomas, a motivational
speaker.

“We wanted to incorporate these statements of
artistic endeavor into one, upfront experience,” said Joe
Tortorici, the album’s producer. “There is even some
maniacal laughter in there, which is a secret joke. But
Chris said, ‘Leave it in.’ And it created an atmosphere for
what followed.”

When addressing Kirkland’s “Dienda,” which Greene
first heard on Marsalis’ Royal Garden Blues, the
challenge centered on how to adapt this jazz waltz into
the quartet’s DNA.

“We pushed it into early ’70s CTI Records-land,”
Greene explained. “We added a slight backbeat, electric
bass, and pushed it as close to the ‘Contemporary Jazz’
line without tipping it over.”

On “The Crossover Appeal,” the album’s showcase
single, Greene is joined by tenor saxophonist Marqueal
Jordan. (Other musicians making guest appearances are
percussionist JoVia Armstrong, guitarist Isaiah Sharkey,
and rapper Julian Davis.) This two-tenor approach,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7
CHRIS GREENE QUARTET'S BOUNDARY ISSUES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Greene noted, is mutual collaboration, not a macho cutting contest.

“There are times when Marqueal ended a line up here, and I would pick up from there,” Greene said.

“We’re throwing behind-the-back passes to each other to get to the basket and just having a great time.”

When the Chris Greene Quartet began 12 years ago, Piano noted, it had an acoustic focus. Then, an urge to play funkier music with acoustic instruments followed, eventually leading to the ensemble’s current footprint.

“With the evolution of our sound, we are finding certain places where there may be more electric (piano and bass) to match the sound we’re going for,” he said. “We’re always trying to push forward and evolve. That’s what has kept what we do fresh. This record, I hope, is a snapshot in our continued evolution.”