

Airborne - Interview by Joe Montague for Jazz Police - 2007

Music for Turbulent Times

Turbulence is a word one normally associates with a rough airplane ride or you hear on a weather report, but it is also the name of the outstanding CD released in August of this year by the contemporary jazz group Airborne. In September 2007, I had the opportunity to speak with Thomas and Gregory Borino, the two brothers, who along with lifelong friend Thomas Sansone founded the group twenty years ago. Each one of the three, play several instruments on the album. In addition, they composed, arranged, produced, engineered and mixed the project themselves.

In describing what the listener will hear when they don their headphones, ear buds or pump up the volume on their speakers, Gregory Borino says, "They are going to get hit with a lot. There will be some light, smooth mellow stuff, but on some of the endings (to the songs), we are really rocking it out quite a bit. The listener will also hear a big band piece, solos and improv, because improvisation is still an important part of what we do. They will hear a CD that has an edge to it but with a master plan"

Thomas Borino adds, "You can still tell it is us, even though there are a lot of influences from many different cultures and styles of music. We definitely captured a World Music motif of the Airborne Sound on this CD. Turbulence is our most favorite project we have ever produced.

"While the songs are different, they are not all over the place. There is a consistency. If you listen to the CD from track one to track nine, it is not like you are thinking, 'Where did this come from?' The CD does flow from song to song with meaning and purpose" says Gregory.

Gregory who engineered and mixed the CD jokes that it aged him by ten years. "There are a lot of tracks, and we had to make them fit into two little speakers, that took some time. The arrangements are complex and well thought out. We didn't just bang something out. Everything was listened to, listened to again, and again and again, to achieve an excellence" he says.

"Festival at Sunset," is the opening track for *Turbulence*, and immediately Thomas Borino's strong keyboarding, Asher Delorme's Latin percussion and Laco Deczi's trumpet transport you to a tropical setting. The song's upbeat tempo is appealing and each chord bears a smile. The guitars (Gregory Borino) start with mellower riffs, but as the song builds to a crescendo, the fretwork becomes a little edgier. Thomas Sansone, Thomas Borino, Donte Hall and Elizabeth Dellinger deliver smooth background vocalese.

Commenting on Airborne's ability to combine the smoother elements of jazz and Latin vibes, without the later dominating the melody and groove, Gregory says, "We also need to give credit to our percussionist Asher Delerme. He is a very smart player. He doesn't just play a part, he is very intense. When he has a part in the recording process, it is there for a reason. That's why it is not overbearing."

Thomas makes the point that although they have lived their lives in the city, that he and Gregory have a heart for the islands of Caribbean, their people and cultures. He believes that strong connection genuinely infuses the Latin vibes heard in Airborne's music.

While admitting to several other influences in their music, Gregory echoes his brother's sentiments as it relates to the Latin grooves in Airborne's music. While attending Boston's Berklee College of Music, Gregory was in a Latin jazz band, and one might say it was love at first listen, as he was enthralled with the emphasis on percussion instruments. Describing the music as positive, passionate and alive, he feels that Airborne's interpretation of Latin rhythms creates an upbeat environment in which people can leave the stresses of their day behind. Certainly, the band's use of Afro Cuban and Brazilian rhythms keeps listeners' feet moving and their bodies swaying.

It's "Smooth Sailing" for Airborne

As strong as the Latin rhythms are in Airborne's music, Gregory says that R&B also has a prominent place. Thomas agrees, "Like Gregory said, we always have been fans of R&B, going back to Motown. That allowed us to cross over to non-jazz lovers.

Turbulence had been out barely a month, at the time of my conversation with the Borino brothers, but they were already receiving positive reviews and heavy demand for their music, from places as far flung as the United Kingdom and Australia. On the home front, radio stations have been burning up the airwaves with cuts from *Turbulence*, and in particular the first single that was released, "Smooth Sailing." In part, they attribute the positive response to Airborne's ability to be genre busters.

"We cross over a lot of different formats, and like Gregory was saying, we have an edge. We don't play it safe. A lot of artists try to work with a mellow formula that (fits a) smooth jazz format (noting that he is not dissing smooth jazz artists). On our CD, we do a lot of variations. We play a big band jazz swing tune, a contemporary piece that is a tribute to the first Americans the Native Americans and an African piece," says Thomas. You can say we are a jazz, contemporary jazz, world, and a smooth jazz group. We are musicians.

Thomas says, "We named it (the CD) *Turbulence*, because there is a lot of confusion in the world, and because it is wartime. Our music is not going to be a

solution, but maybe it can be a wakeup call for peace. We have tried to convey that through our music. It is not an answer, but we hope it is something that wakes people up. The world needs a little bit of global unity. We tried to give our music a soothing feel.”

At the same time, Gregory wants to make sure that the listening public clearly understands how Airborne perceives their role, and what their music is trying to accomplish. “We are first and foremost musicians, not politicians, but we are also smart, educated and humanitarian people. If in some way, we can bring a little change that is fine. We are not hard, revolutionary type of musicians. We are not the Bob Dylans or Joan Baezs of the sixties.

Thomas adds, “We try to keep the politics out of the music and make it a message of love.”

Today, Thomas and Gregory Borino still enjoy listening to the music of musicians who originally inspired them. For Gregory, who plays both electric and acoustic guitars he was first attracted to the music of guitarists who are now considered to be icons, people like Carlos Santana, Pat Metheny, Larry Carlton and Lee Ritenour. Thomas lists pianist / composer Chick Corea as a major influence, referring to his compositions as “amazing,” and to Corea as “a legend.” He has also been inspired by the music of Herbie Hancock and George Duke.