

Airborne Interview by Susan Frances – Jazz Review - 2007

Airborne - Authentically Multi-Cultured - Musical Peacemakers

The six-man and one-woman contemporary jazz/world music ensemble Airborne, who call the heart of New Haven, Connecticut their home, are setting course for a tour in support of their latest release *Turbulence* from Tilt Records. Formed in 1988, Airborne is comprised of seven musicians who respect each others individuality and musical diversity which ranges from Latin, African, and Caribbean influences to R&B, Soul, Gospel, and Jazz palates.

Founding core members and composers Thomas Borino on piano, Greg Borino on guitars, and Thomas Sansone on saxophone expanded the trio into a quintet with the addition of bassist Steven Clarke, and drummer Dean Kosh, for the band's debut album *Take Off* in 1990. The band proceeded as a 5-piece through their follow up albums which included *Across the Sky* in 1995 and *Lifetones* in 1999. The band added a new element into the mix in 2004 when percussionist Asher Delorme and singer Elizabeth Dellinger joined Airborne for the recordings of their fourth studio album *Heavy Vibes* and on their current release *Turbulence*.

The band is excited about coming into their 20th year together in 2008, still feeling good about their enterprising sound and making a difference across the globe and in their own corner of the world. The band discusses their involvement in community arts programs as well as how their music has grown in the last twenty years. Airborne's music is as multi-cultured as ever with an authenticity that takes the listener to the place of its origins. Its members are as autonomous as always with reverence for each others musical diversity as they bring it all together into a floral musical collage.

Jazzreview: What was the recording process like for *Turbulence*?

Airborne: The recording process usually starts with a composition and arrangement that is written by either Thomas Borino, Thomas Sansone or Greg Borino. The other musicians then add their talent and musical thoughts to the song. No one is ever told what to play. Each musicians input has created the jazz sound that is Airborne.

Jazzreview: How did the song "Drums of Peace" from *Turbulence* come together?

Airborne: Thomas Sansone wrote and played that haunting melodic saxophone on this interesting music piece. The chants in 'Drums of Peace' are actually from a few African dialects. The chants proclaim 'Listen to the drums of peace,' 'Awake the peace,' and 'Peace of the World.' Authentic African drums and rhythms beat to the cry of that continent.

Jazzreview: How was the arrangement for the track “Can’t Fight Love” decided?

Airborne: Thomas Borino wrote, arranged and sang on this funky duet with Elizabeth Dellinger. Our R&B roots from childhood come out in this tune. We grew up listening to soul and Motown as well as jazz. The band is blessed with vocal abilities both male and female. This crosses us over to non-jazz lovers, especially in a live venue where a classic R&B tune can put a place on fire.

Jazzreview: Does the band use any music technology for the recordings?

Airborne: In the studio, we use Steinberg products. They are great programs and offer much to enhance the music. All the music on *Turbulence* is actually played.

Jazzreview: Why did Airborne decide to go with a big band sound for the song “Hillside Swing”?

Airborne: ‘Hillside Swing’ was a challenge and it took a lot of tracks, time and listening. But we are all very happy with the result.

Jazzreview: What are some of the themes of the songs on *Turbulence*?

Airborne: Our world is overwhelmingly filled with physical, emotional, political and economical distress, disaster, and confusion. That you can say is turbulence. We are not saying that music is a solution. The answers are found in our society, in that awareness and attitudes (which) are very important factors for everyone. The message we want to convey is that we can all make a difference in this world of need. If we try to help, support, and mostly understand. Only then can we find and achieve peace and global unity. I guess the message is love.

Jazzreview: What was the impetus for making *Turbulence*?

Airborne: *Turbulence* is one of those projects where everything just lined up and worked. There was a special enthusiasm in each musician. I guess you can say there was no *Heavy Vibes* in the recording, pun intended. That was our last CD. We recorded and produced this one. I think the compassion we have for this music is ever present in this recording.

Jazzreview: How is *Turbulence* different from Airborne’s previous albums?

Airborne: Our first 3 CD’s were mostly instrumental. The *Heavy Vibes* and *Turbulence* added our percussionist and vocalist (Elizabeth Dellinger). We do think *Turbulence* is our best yet. We are very happy with the compositions, arrangements and sound quality, and the message it represents.

Jazzreview: Why does the band gravitate to Island and Latin accents in your music?

Airborne: We are from New Haven, Connecticut, USA, Tri-State Area, urban based. I guess you can call us city dwellers. There is a magic in the city that absorbs many musical art forms. The sounds of the city are cool but hot. Influences of Jazz, R&B, Latin, and Blues are all around you, capturing your inner emotions. We also have a passion for the music of the Caribbean. When someone asks what kind of music we do, we tell them contemporary jazz with an island passion and urban emotion.

Jazzreview: When did the band members first come together?

Airborne: The band was formed in 1988. This year 2008, we will be celebrating our 20th Anniversary. The band has survived all the ups and downs of being musicians. I can honestly say that the years have been very rewarding to us. To live a life of music is a wonderful experience and a precious gift. To continue working with these amazing musicians is an honor.

Jazzreview: What was it like growing up in New Haven, Connecticut?

Airborne: Our hometown of New Haven is very rich in ethnic and cultural diversity. Each member is unique and brings these diversities and backgrounds to create the jazz sound. Airborne has been praised as being a living spirit of musical brotherhood.

Jazzreview: What was Airborne's first rehearsal like?

Airborne: Even in the early years of the band, there was a real commitment to create good jazz music. Many comments of the band were that no one ever stood in the background. Each musician contributed to the sound of the band. An Airborne performance always showcases the talents of all the musicians but still keeps the integrity of the composition. That was always present even in the early years.

Jazzreview: When was Airborne's first major show and what was it like?

Airborne: 1990, in our hometown of New Haven at the legendary Toads Place. We performed with Tower Of Power. The place was jamming and such a funky good time. We were received with such respect and an overwhelming response, FOUR encores!!

Jazzreview: What was the band's musical direction in those early days?

Airborne: The jazz band started with both originals and classic R&B tunes. Even from the beginning, the band's sound has been jazz with Latin and R&B flavor.

I think the first tunes we recorded were 'Rips Café', 'No Restrictions', and 'Passion'.

Jazzreview: Who came up with the name of the band and why did it fit?

Airborne: Greg Borino came up with the name. Airborne describes something in flight and constant movement.

Jazzreview: What keeps the members motivated to stay in the band?

Airborne: We love the process of each new recording project and release. The intervention of ideas, the collaborations of musicians creating the jazz sound that is Airborne today. Bringing life and love to each new composition. Keeping faith and watching the growth in the band's material and popularity.

Jazzreview: How have the band members changed over the years?

Airborne: I think over the years, we have developed into better musicians and humanitarians.

Jazzreview: When did everyone in the band begin playing their instruments?

Airborne: Everyone started private lessons on our instruments from age 12 years old and up and all of us have studied music in college.

Jazzreview: Who are some of the musicians or bands that you have made friends with or recorded tracks for?

Airborne: We have recorded and produced for artists of many different genres - Jazz, R&B, and Gospel.

Jazzreview: Why does the band stay with the indie record label Tilt?

Airborne: I guess the freedom of recording and producing our own CD's. It is easier to create without restrictions. The music will then become the first priority. We input and decide the marketing ideas. So the right message and the music become one and easier to communicate. We have a vision on how our music is represented. We look for people of humility to be on board to help our career and cause.

Jazzreview: How did the band get involved in the Arts Education Program with the Connecticut Commission of the Arts?

Airborne: We support the Arts. We are on the New England Foundation for the Arts and the Connecticut Commission on the Arts performing (on their) arts touring rosters. We bring 'A Century of Jazz' Arts in Education program into the

schools. A demonstration of a variety of jazz forms and styles supported by a historical narration, a musical insight, a question and answer session, and an inspirational workshop. This program instills a positive attitude and direction towards musical and social growth. The no limits approach combined with a structural musical lesson plan illustrates the value of jazz education in our society.

Jazzreview: What are your thoughts about these music education programs?

Airborne: Jazz education is very vital for our newer generations. Teaching thoughts of imagination, personal expression and self-discipline to help them achieve whatever goals they dream. Emotions soar high in young hearts and jazz music gently provides an enrichment and fulfillment to their wandering passion. Jazz is a true American art form.

Jazzreview: On the band's MySpace site, you posted an email from a fan named Corey Woodard who wrote that he is stationed in Afghanistan and really enjoys jazz music. How did the note make the band feel and is Airborne scheduled to do a USO Tour?

Airborne: That email was an emotional cry for a touch of home by a US service man who loved our music serving in the 'Forgotten War' Afghanistan. We shipped a few copies of all our CD's to the troops. The *Turbulence* CD has just been released and airplay is just beginning. Our next step is to set up a tour promoting the CD. No USO Tours are planned, but who knows. Our hearts go out to all these men and women in harms way.

Jazzreview: What is your impression of the Internet?

Airborne: We are true internet believers. It makes the world a smaller place. It has helped us promote our music all over the world. The music of Airborne reaches out to everyone in our crazy world. Airborne is multi-cultural and international.