

For immediate release

Facing West, a new chordless quartet rooted in bebop tradition and executed with contemporary flair, releases their debut: “Facing West,” a self-titled celebration of music, the road, and camaraderie

NEW YORK CITY, N.Y. - **“Facing West”**: a title evocative and rich with symbolism of discovery and stepping across the precipice of greatness. Indeed, a more apt encapsulation of the music and personnel of this **chordless quartet** would be difficult to find as they stride forward, **music freshly invigorated by their US tour**, to create their debut album. With the band and album symbiotically named after each other, *Facing West* stands as a testament to the unified brilliance of this creative cohort.

It all began with a podcast. **Tenor saxophonist and pedagogue Donnie Norton** received a call from his old friend, Doug Stone to appear on Stone’s podcast. **Stone, a tenor saxophonist and educator himself**, runs a program focused on all things tenor saxophone entitled **“Tenor Talk”** and saw Norton as a perfect fit for the program on an episode in 2020. Following the podcast, the saxophonists began talking about their mutual connections, both from school and life, and soon the names of **drummer Brian Claxton** and **bassist Braun Khan** came up. “All of the members knew each other and had played with each other in various other walks of life,” Norton says, “but the four of us had never played together as a unit.” That quickly changed as the four went from a group of friends to a powerful quartet, creating original music that pays homage to the freedom of expression found in the great chordless jazz ensembles of the past.

The album’s title is **a nod to that which changed the band from a group of musicians to a unified collective**: their tour. The phrase “Facing West” pays homage to the **geographical origin of their tour**, which began on the West Coast of the United States before growing and developing with the rhythm of the road. Where lesser bands may have deliberated about how to move forward as a unit, this ensemble, already a crowd of established musicians, **booked a tour and recording session first** and used the committed deadline to inspire them to create the high-caliber content they are known for. “We flew into Portland and rehearsed for about 30 minutes,” Stone says. “[We then] played a concert, basically sight-reading the music.” This process continued over the next ten days, each day rehearsing more and **building off the shared musical experience** of its predecessor before creating something new on the bandstand that night. “We talk a lot about music when we are together, and then we do our job. It is a wonderful group and the music reflects that.”

For the album and corresponding tour, each band member contributed four original works, which were pared down to two, that were brought to life and evolved over time through the unique personalities presenting the music and their time together regularly playing that music. “What I love about the writing in this group is that all of our compositions have enough personality and integrity to inspire unique improvisations,” Norton says. **“Our repertoire inspires our soloing.”** Compositionally, each member of Facing West draws on different sources of inspiration to inform their writing. Khan writes about and finds inspiration in **experiences with his family**. Claxton’s music is centered around the interlock and drive of the rhythm section. “Brian writes tunes that, first and foremost, have some type of **strong, deep, intense**

groove.” Stone says. “Then, we just go from there.” Norton’s music has a **distinct harmonic and rhythmic concept**, using clever alterations and intentional metric modulations to execute his musical vision. Conversely, Stone’s music emphasizes **memorable and singable melodies** with understated harmony, creating a refreshing contrast to the music of his peers. “We want our sound to be rooted in good, traditional jazz conception,” saxophonist Doug Stone says. “Being unique is not our goal; **playing truthful, joyful, meaningful, feel-good music is our goal.**”

The collaboration between members of Facing West was paramount and beautifully executed. The vision and emotional content was performed and developed by the individuals within the ensemble with the **highest respect for the composition and composer.** “We get along exceptionally well personally and musically, and we are receptive to, and respectful of, each other’s ideas,” says Norton. “I think we all feel comfortable enough with ourselves and what we are doing collectively to always enjoy the moment and to **treat the music with the technical attention and emotional depth that it deserves.**” Beyond their shared musical respect, Norton cites one of the key reasons for their success is their interpersonal dynamic. “After two tours and two recording sessions, there really has not been an experience we have had together that has not been enjoyable and **rewarding both personally and musically,**” he says. “We get along quite well as people, and I think that is reflected in our music.” Additionally, each member of the ensemble is active as an educator at a university, and this understanding of the learning and collaborative processes has added a smoothness to *Facing West’s* professional endeavors.

Facing West exists as a standout album, not only in the joy with which it was created and developed, but with the sheer wondrous vivacity the four musicians bring to their craft. *Facing West* presents audiences with the true interaction and collaboration found in live music that dwindled in the isolation of recent years, and in so doing refreshes and reaffirms the hearts and minds of listeners. More than an album, *Facing West* is a celebration of what can be achieved together when the human spirit intermingles with creative honesty.

Facing West releases on **Outside in Music** on **August 19th, 2022.**

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