

JazzTimes®



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Chantale Gagné Trio Silent Strength Chantale Gagné

By [Thomas Conrad](#)

Chantale Gagné is a young pianist from Quebec with the sound judgment to bring in Peter Washington and Lewis Nash as the rhythm section on her debut recording. Washington's time is like Big Ben's, and Nash's energy is a crisp tailwind. They make Gagné's music glide with elegance at any speed.

Gagné plays with a clear, assertive touch and a balanced, intelligent sense of form, if not much appetite for risk. Her "But Beautiful" is so orderly and methodical that it misses the song's emotion. (Washington's brief bass solo stays close to the melody and contains more wistfulness.) Monk's "I Mean You" is accurate but unadventurous. Her most interesting interpretation of a standard is Bill Evans' "Peri's Scope," where her displaced accents create unanticipated tension and gratifying release.

Gagné's compositions are well made. Her uptempo and funky tunes ("Second Wave," "In My Mind") sound generic and vaguely familiar. Her slower stuff is stronger. "Tranquilité" and "New York Nights" sustain intense, quiet reveries as they patiently unfold their stories.

JazzWax

Marc Myers blogs daily on jazz legends and legendary jazz recordings

July 20, 2009

Chantale Gagne: Silent Strength

I came upon Chantale Gagne's *Silent Strength* completely by accident. The French-Canadian jazz pianist recorded this album in 2007, but I only discovered it last weekend while searching to see who had recorded Bill Evans' *Peri's Scope*. After sampling the Evans track and then others, I had to get hold of the CD. And ask Chantale a few questions.

Chantale Gagne (pronounced SHAN-tahl Gan-yay) was born in 1980 and began her jazz career on the organ. At age 15, after hearing a Bill Evans recording, she switched to piano. After studies in Quebec in the late 1990s, Chantale studied briefly with pianist Kenny Barron, a meeting that redoubled her commitment to the jazz piano. Recently, she has been touring with bassist Peter Washington and drummer Lewis Nash, both of whom appear on *Silent Strength*.

Chantale's originals on this album have depth and maturity that transcend her years. *Second Wave* is a rousing, lyrical tune and *Tranquilite* bristles with sensitivity and Bill Evans-like tenderness. *In My Mind* has a Bobby Timmons/Art Blakey funkiness, with Nash hammering out the 2/4 feel.

Chantale uses a soft bossa nova on *Silent Strength*, and follows it with a lilting waltz called *New York Nights*. *Reves* has the same, introspective impression. Her rendition of Thelonious Monk's *I Mean You* captures the bop pianist's disjointed feel but brings a softer feel to it. The album's high point for me is Evans' *Peri's Scope*, which Chantale takes at a brisk pace, finishing with her own chord flourish. But *Beautiful* receives an equally sensitive treatment. Closing out the CD is *Subway Rag*, a playful ode to the New York's transit system.

To learn more about Chantale and her art, I reached out to her in Quebec, and we had the following exchange by e-mail:

JazzWax: Was Bill Evans a big influence?

Chantale Gagne: Indeed, Bill Evans has been a very important influence. Portrait





in Jazz is the first jazz album I listened to, and that's how I decided to play jazz. Bill Evans' playing is always beautiful and always means something to me. He's extremely melodic and emotional, and he plays with his heart. Everything he plays comes from somewhere, and everything he plays takes us somewhere! Bill Evans has a sound that nobody else has. It's very particular.

JW: Is there a female approach to the jazz piano that male players miss? Or is jazz gender-free?

CG: I think it's nice sometimes to have a female touch but overall I don't believe you absolutely need it. Jazz is gender-free. I think whoever you are—female or male—if you communicate your feelings and play with your heart, that's the most important thing. When you play or compose, communicating your feelings and provoking feelings is the essence of jazz.

JW: Many male jazz artists have male jazz heroes. Is there a female jazz artist who has inspired you?

CG: Not really. My jazz heroes are mostly men. But when I think of Marian McPartland [pictured] who, back in the 1940s and 1950s made her place among this guys' world and has been respected throughout her life by guys, I find it's pretty amazing. But again, I really and truly see jazz as gender-free. I believe that as long as you create beautiful music and your music arouses emotions, images and feelings in the listener, it doesn't matter whether you are a man or a woman. When I sit down to play, I'm not thinking of anyone or anything in particular. Just to play as beautifully as possible.



JW: Has there been pain or sorrow in your life from which your art emanates?

CG: Not really pain or trauma. I would say it's a matter of the environment where I find myself, physically or spiritually. When I compose I think it appears more, and you can hear the difference. I have to admit, of course, that my life experience is quite short so far, of course, and will continue to be integrated into my music.

JW: You're French-Canadian. Do you think that made you more sensitive?

CG: I'm not sure yet if being Quebecoise helps what I do. But I can say



for sure that I received a warm welcome from New Yorkers whenever I play there. I find that New Yorkers are very open. People want to know me and know where I come from. They ask why I started playing, how come I've had the will to try it and how come I am so gutsy. Because it's true, I don't know lots of people in my city who have done this. New York is a difficult world but so interesting and full of surprises.

JW: Will you be recording again soon?

CG: Hopefully in 2010. I'm working now on new material. I will likely change the ambiance a bit. I think it's important for me to do so now. It's too early to describe the theme, but I





can say that I very much like music with a folk influence and that Lewis [Nash, pictured] and Peter [Washington] sound wonderful playing this music!! I can already hear Lewis' drums.



JazzWax tracks: Chantale Gagne's

Silent Strength was self-produced and can be found as a download at iTunes or Amazon, or on CD [here](#). For more on Chantale and to hear samples of tracks, visit her site [here](#).

Posted by Marc Myers at 05:55 AM | [Permalink](#)

Technorati Tags: [Bill Evans](#), [Chantale Gagne](#), [Lewis Nash](#), [Marian McPartland](#), [Peter Washington](#)

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Based on the samples I've heard, Gagne is very good. Fine time and touch in particular; her lines just "pop." Nice ear, Marc.

Posted by: Larry Kart | [July 20, 2009 at 08:48 PM](#)

I already have the disc and dig it too!

Posted by: Red Colm O'Sullivan | [July 21, 2009 at 06:19 AM](#)

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Chantale Gagné

Silent strength

www.chantalegagne.com

Nicht vielen Pianisten wird das Glück zuteil, ihre Debut-CD mit dem Traum-Rhythmus-Team von Bassist Peter Washington und Schlagzeuger Lewis Nash aufzunehmen, die unter anderem mit Piano-Altmeister Tommy Flanagan ein gefeiertes Trio bildeten. Die junge Pianistin und Komponistin Chantale Gagné aus Quebec/Kanada wird diesem Ritterschlag voll gerecht. Sie hat die technische Fertigkeit, den Einfallsreichtum und den Swing. Gleich im ersten Titel, ihrer Eigenkomposition „Second Wave“, brilliert sie mit abwechslungsreichen Läufen über dem pulsierenden Beat der Rhythm Section. Im ruhigen „Tranquilité“ verbindet sie anrührende Innerlichkeit mit exquisiter Anschlagkultur. Während „But Beautiful“ etwas brav bleibt, löst sie sich bei Monks „I Mean You“ schnell von der bekannten Komposition und improvisiert auf ganz eigenständige Weise. Es gibt Hoffnung für das Format des klassischen Klaviertrios jenseits von Bill Charlap.

Hans-Bernd Kittlaus

02.03.09

NEW ISSUES

1) MAHANADA MANNAHATTA

SPLASC(H) 2518

*SOMETHING SPECIFIC AND
PERFECT FOR MY CITY/ THE
ABORIGINAL NAME/ A WORD,
LIQUID, SANE, UNRULY/
MUSICAL, SELF-SUFFICIENT/ THE
WORD OF MY CITY/ THE DOWN-
TOWN STREETS/ IMMIGRANTS
ARRIVING/ VEHICLES/
BROADWAY/ THE WOMEN, THE
SHOPS AND SHOWS/ A MILLION
PEOPLE/ CITY OF HURRIED
AND SPARKLING WATERS/ CITY
OF SPIRES AND MASTS/ CITY
NESTED IN BAYS/ MY CITY!*
66:30.

Luciano Troja, p; Giancarlo Mazzi,
prep g, vcl; Carmelo Coglitore,
ss, bcl, d; Carlo Nicita, alto flt.
4/17/06, NY, NY.

2) CHANTALE GAGNÉ SILENT STRENGTH

CHANTALE GAGNE NO#

*SECOND WAVE/ TRANQUILITÉ/
IN MY MIND/ SILENT STRENGTH
/ NEW YORK NIGHTS/ I MEAN
YOU/ R?VES/ PERI'S SCOPE/
BUT BEAUTIFUL/ SUBWAY RAG.*
51:24.

Gagné, p; Peter Washington, b;
Lewis Nash, d. 4/9/07, NY, NY.

3) DAVE STRYKER - STEVE SLAGLE THE SCENE

ZOHO 200810

Spring in New York City is a special time of year. Here are three musical looks at the Big Apple, coincidentally recorded in three successive Aprils. As a bonus, each album neatly represents a different aspect of the city's musical culture.

New York is, of course, a magnet for tourists. On (1), Mahanada, the Italian quartet of pianist Luciano Troja, prepared guitarist Giancarlo Mazzi, flutist Carlo Nicita, and multi-instrumentalist Carmelo Coglitore on soprano saxophone, bass clarinet, and drums, finds itself in Manhattan to play a series of seven concerts. Inspired by both the city and the poetry of Walt Whitman, whose ode to the city provides the song titles, the group recorded "15 aboriginal tracks" in an impromptu suite. Their aim was to "find a straightforward, primitive way of tackling how we were seeing and feeling New York..." and to that end, they incorporate the street sounds of New York in the mix. The album starts with the sound of an official voice from the subway system announcing trains as the band fades in on a mutant shuffle. The improvisations proceed hesitantly at times, slowly gaining confidence in the contours of what they've conjured up, a bit like the way that the wide-eyed look of fresh tourists changes after a few days in town to a more self-assured attitude. The band's textures are fresh, generally with a strong melodic bent, seasoned by Mazzi's prepared guitar. The focus often shifts unexpectedly from player to player, with a number of solo and duet passages sprinkled through the tracks. Definitely not for all tastes, but an especially adventuresome and engaging set of free improv with a distinctive and almost programmatic focus.

New York has always been a good town for pianists, home base for such disparate stylists as Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Cecil Taylor, Bobby Short, and so many other well-known performers. Chantale Gagné aims to join those ranks with (2), a pleasant trio date with the A-list rhythm team of bassist Peter Washington and drummer Lewis Nash. The Québec-born Gagné studied with Kenny Barron, who supplies a personal set of liner notes to the project. In addition to seven functional originals, she performs Monk's "Ask Me Now," Bill Evans' "Peri's Scope," and "But Beautiful," a standard also favored by Evans. The music jumps out of the gate on the boppish "Second Wave," and Gagné immediately establishes her bright and articulate sound. Nash and Washington, of course, can play just about anything, and their warm support is also apparent from the get-go. After a couple of snappy choruses, Washington steps out with a busy walk, the first of his many solos on the disk. Gagné flies back in to trade fours with the ever-tasty Nash for a satisfyingly swinging opening. Structuring the CD like a typical club set,

NEW ISSUES

SKEE/ THE SCENE/ SIX FOUR TEO*/ TWO SENSE/ KINDRED SPIRITS/ HOPEWELL'S LAST*/ BRIGHTER DAYS*/ FINGERS IN THE WIND/ STRIKOLOGY. 55:38.*

Slagle, as, ss, flt; Joe Lovano, ts*; Stryker, g; Jay Anderson, b; Victor Lewis, d. 4/15/08, New Paltz, NY.



Joseph Jarman by Frank Rubolino



Bruce Eisenbeil by Frank Rubolino

the jumping opener gives way to an original ballad, “Tranquilité,” that Gagné caresses with intriguing harmonies over deft brushwork by Nash. Next is the hard-bopping “In My Mind” with a hip bass and drum duet. The Brazilian-flavored “Silent Strength” slow it down once again to a slightly up groove that brings out the best in Gagné, a perfect tempo for her lyrical invention. Her waltz “New York Nights” seems like a pretty calm tune for the Big Apple, but maybe she lives in a quiet part of town. Gagné is generous with the solo responsibilities, and bassist Washington takes another vigorous and melodic solo here that grows directly out of his accompaniment. She’s a bit subdued on the Monk, and I found myself paying more attention to the snappy bass and drum parts than to the piano. “R’ves” is another laid-back number, with more fine bass work by Washington. The Evans tune is bright and cheerful, and, somewhat predictably, “But Beautiful” slow the music down all over again with lush voicings and a wistful feeling. The brief and really old-time “Subway Rag” is a humorous way to end the date. With her first release, Gagné establishes herself as a polished and more than competent Fifties- and Sixties-styled player, well-versed in the various streams of post-bop piano from Bobby Timmons to Bill Evans to, well, Kenny Barron. What has yet to emerge is a strong sense of individuality that would make her music really stand out from the loads of piano trio albums out there.

There are still plenty of Jazz spots in New York, and on any given night in the year, you might just hear the Stryker/Slagle Band at one of them, sounding pretty much like they do on **(3)**. Guitarist Dave Stryker and saxophonist Steve Slagle have been working together in one format or another since the late Eighties, most often in a quartet or quintet setting. The band offers a unified and concentrated sound, consistently strong soloists in Slagle and Stryker, and the sturdy rhythms of bassist Jay Anderson and drummer Victor Lewis. The program, familiar-sounding tunes written separately by the band-leaders, plus a ponderous flute and acoustic guitar duet version of Rahsaan Roland Kirk’s “Fingers In the Wind,” is a solid mix of bopping up-tempo numbers and ballads, enhanced on three tracks by the presence of tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano. The intricacies of bebop and the progressive sounds of the Sixties, as articulated by composers like Charles Mingus and Wayne Shorter, are the major influences on the writing. Slagle, who spent a lot of time in the Mingus Big Band in the Nineties, has a bright and bubbly sound on alto saxophone, his main horn. Stryker, one-time Stanley Turrentine and Brother Jack McDuff sideman, has a full-bodied modern sound that comes at Jazz from the blues side of things.