



## PRESS RELEASE



ZZ QUARTET  
MIDNIGHT IN EUROPE  
IOR CD 77145-2



1. Pippo (05:32)
2. Twilight Time Again (08:06)
3. Voglio Una Donna (05:03)
4. Frida Is Vanished (07:47)
5. Baracoa (07:40)

6. Morgagni Est (04:22)
7. River Spirit (10:29)
8. Café Finale (09:47)
9. The Easy Whistler (04:57)

Simone Zanchini – accordion, electronics  
Ratko Zjaca - electric guitar, electronics  
Martin Gjakonovski - acoustic bass  
Adam Nussbaum - drums

### ZZ QUARTET MIDNIGHT IN EUROPE (IN+OUT Records)

This third outing by the ZZ Quartet, co-led by guitarist Ratko Zjaca and accordionist Simone Zanchini, finds the intrepid improvisers and virtuosos on their respective instruments stretching and exploring in separate live settings last year. Recorded in pre-pandemic times at the Milestone Jazz Club in Piacenza and at the Cantina Bentivoglio during the 2019 Bologna Jazz Festival, „Midnight in Europe“ finds Zjaca and Zanchini taking liberties with some of their own tunes they had previously recorded on two previous studio recordings — 2010’s „The Way We Talk“ and 2013’s „Beyond the Lines“. The two also played together on Zanchini’s 2015 album „Don’t Try This Anywhere“, the accordionist’s tribute to the late tenor sax great Michael Brecker.

Accompanied by bassist Martin Gjakonovski, a native of Macedonia now living in Bergisch Gladbach near Cologne, and Zjaca’s longtime collaborator, American drummer Adam Nussbaum, whose wealth of credits include touring and recording with saxophonist Brecker, guitarists John Scofield and John Abercrombie, and legendary bandleader Gil Evans, Zjaca and Zanchini present an eclectic set of music that organically blends aspects of jazz, classical, folkloric, world music and rock, with just a touch of humor along the way from the fertile imaginations of these stellar improvisors.

“Simone and I grew up listening to jazz, and jazz is American music,” said Zjaca, a Croatian native and longtime resident of Rotterdam. “But we always want to declare that we come from Europe and that we are, with the exception of Adam, a European band.”

That quintessentially European element can be clearly heard on Zanchini’s plaintive ballad *Frida Is Vanished*, where his love for the films of fellow Rimini native Federico Fellini comes through (the accordionist last year delivered a brilliant tribute to Fellini’s main music composer Nino Rota in collaboration with the Frankfurt Radio Big Band). This live version extends by a full eight minutes the studio version that the ZZ Quartet delivered on „The Way We Talk“, courtesy of Zanchini’s dramatic and expansive solo accordion intro. Nussbaum’s alluring brushwork sets the delicate tone here alongside Gjakonovski’s minimalist, contrapuntal bass lines. Zjaca solos in a subdued, warm-toned Jim Hall mode

while Zanchini acquits himself with elegance and uncommon expressiveness throughout, with flashes of his signature virtuosity punctuating the wistful vibe. “I’m very close to these kinds of melodies,” said Simone. “I grew up with this kind of sound, more or less. And I play an instrument that also is very connected to this kind of romantic Mediterranean sound. *Frida Is Vanished* is the closest composition on the album to that kind of melody and lyricism of Nino Rota and all that Mediterranean music. It’s a kind of blending together of the Italian melody or *cantabile* with chromaticism. And both together can be a good sound.”

By contrast, Zjaca’s driving, uptempo *Voglio Una Donna* (previously recorded on „Beyond the Lines“) conveys a modernist jazz sensibility in the rapid-fire eight bar exchanges between accordionist Zanchini and drummer Nussbaum. Gjakonovski’s forceful bass lines fuel the track alongside Nussbaum’s brisk brushwork. And catch Zanchini briefly emulating a Brazilian cuica at the 3:12 mark. Also note Zjaca’s use of a riff from Jimi Hendrix’s „Manic Depression“ as a repeating motif throughout the song. Said the composer, “That’s what we like. We like Hendrix, we like Fellini, we like Wayne Shorter, we like Michael Brecker, we like



Coltrane. And we like to mix it all up."

The album's spirited opener, Zanchini's **Pippo**, was previously recorded on „The Way We Talk“. A tightly orchestrated number with a challenging head played in unison between bass, accordion, guitar and drums, it goes through some intricate time-shifting, from 4/4 to 3/4 to 5/4, without dropping a beat. Zjaca's solo here is splintered and full of dissonance, more coming out of the edgier James Blood Ulmer school than the more polished Pat Metheny school. Midway through his solo he kicks on an effects pedal that takes the tune into a different tonal zone. Nussbaum follows with some muscular drum fills before Zanchini takes off on an energized Latin section that sounds reminiscent of Chick Corea's famous Armando's Rhumba. Bassist Gjakonovski follows suit with a perfectly executed tumbao groove here.

Zjaca flirts with 11/4 time on his upbeat, mid-tempo swinger **Twilight Time Again**, which features guitar and accordion locked in tight unions on the intricate head. The guitarist channels his inner lines on his blues-tinged solo here while bassist Gjakonovski steps forward and delivers a remarkably melodic solo before the piece returns to the appealing theme and resolves on an ambient note.

The guitarist's entrancing minor key number **Baracoa**, named for the Cuban city he visited a few years ago, shifts nimbly from 3/4 to 5/4 and also blends a subtle Metheny influence with a touch of the Mediterranean. Gjakonovski contributes a fleet-fingered bass solo on this number which previously appeared on Zjaca's 2018 organ quartet album, „Life On Earth“.

Zanchini's **Morgagni Est** (from „The Way We Talk“) may be the most subversive offering of the set. With the accordionist incorporating digital looping and electronics and the guitarist stomping on his effect pedals (notably a wah-wah filter and a touch of distortion on his solo), this outré bit of collective improv is by far the group's edgiest number. "Because it's essentially no changes, we wanted to push the envelop and really going into wild dynamics," said Zjaca. "This tune is more about listening to each other playing no chords, just reacting on the musical motifs and the different pitch sounds."

Zjaca's mellow and mysterious **River Spirit** (from „Beyond the Lines“) opens with an unaccompanied bass solo from Gjakonovski. A Metheny influence can be heard in the writing and the lyricism from the guitarist on this enchanting number. Also, catch Zanchini's sly quote from Dizzy Gillespie's „Birk's Works“ in the middle of his solo here.

The only number here not previously recorded is Zanchini's **Café Finale**. With a chops-busting head that segues to an urgent, up-tempo swing section, it is the accordionist's clear nod to his mentor and role model, American bop-inspired jazz accordion pioneer of the early 1950s, Art van Damme. "Art was definitely my guru," he said. "I had a chance to play with him when I was around 26 years old. And then in 2006 I made

an album called „Fuga per Art“, which is a tribute to Art Van Damme where I reimagined all his arrangements of his famous quintet with vibes (1953's „Martini Time“). It's a modern version of that music and I sent him the album in Los Angeles when it was finished. He later wrote me two letters on a typewriter, which I have in my studio like a very precious treasure. The first one he sent me had a lot of compliments and the second one he wrote from the hospital. And among all the congratulations he wrote: 'Hey Simone, we have to be quick to play again together because I am in the hospital and I'm turning 89.' And then after a few months he died. So, with Art, I am completely close, not just with the music but also in a human way. He was one of my first inspirations ever. Still today he is. Art was my first teacher, my first point of reference, my guru, my friend. I really loved that guy." Following in the footsteps of Van Damme and another big accordion inspiration, Frank Marocco, Zanchini continues to push the accordion forward by wedding his unparalleled facility to his boundless imagination and fearless abandon.

You can hear a touch of humor injected into **The Easy Whistler**, Simone's answer to Bobby McFerrin's „Don't Worry, Be Happy“. Coming after the surging swinger **Café Finale**, it almost sounds like parody.

"We call this musical theater," said Zjaca of the ZZ Quartet's eclectic approach. "We want to be open for any ideas, any sound. We like rock music, we like jazz, avantgarde music, swing, everything. We don't want to be in a cage just playing one particular groove or style or sound. You can hear that there are a lot of different directions that we are going in. We're not afraid to play a simple swing tune and then we will go to the really open territories. That's what we like to do. We like going out of our comfort zones."

Added Zanchini, "I guess this is really one of the power points of the band, this kind of capacity to stretch the music so much and walk through all those different genres and music styles. And because of this attitude, every concert is different. We may have the same setlist, but we bring different aromatics, different atmospheres. We really try every night to do something new."

And they succeeded in grand fashion on these two unforgettable nights in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region. From structured forms to sublime ballads to free flowing conversations on the bandstand, the ZZ Quartet speaks in a myriad of tongues on „Midnight in Europe“.

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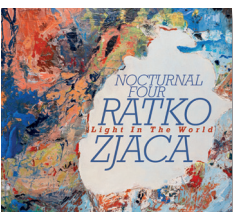
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