

NEWS RELEASE

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Saxophonist/Composer Brian McCarthy Shares His Story Through the Events and Characters That Have Shaped Him, Personally and Musically

Out Nov. 28, *Codex* features McCarthy's stellar quartet with Justin Kauflin, Evan Gregor and Jared Schonig paying homage to musical and personal mentors and world-changing events

Binding together ancient manuscripts into book form, a codex offers a unique glimpse into the events, ideas and impressions that go into a particular history. With his new album, ***Codex***, saxophonist/composer **Brian McCarthy** offers a modern, musical version of those archaic texts, presenting a sonic autobiography through a collection of homages and interpretations that touch on the crucial events and mentors of his life to date.

Set for release on **November 28**, *Codex* also marks the recorded debut of McCarthy's longstanding quartet, featuring pianist **Justin Kauflin** (Clark Terry, Quincy Jones), bassist **Evan Gregor** (Phil Woods, David Liebman) and drummer **Jared Schonig** (Kurt Elling, Nicholas Payton). The presence of these three gifted collaborators is as much a part of McCarthy's personal codex as the compositions they play: his association with both Kauflin and Gregor dates back to their days at William Paterson University, while Schonig, a more recent acquaintance, was a perfect fit while bringing his unique rhythmic voice into the band.

"As a codex is a way of binding ancient text together, so for me this album feels like binding the information of Brian McCarthy together," the composer says. "It's almost an information source for the things that make me *me*."

Codex follows on the heels of McCarthy's acclaimed album *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, a nonet album that paired insightful new arrangements of vintage wartime folk songs with vibrant new compositions to explore the American Civil War at another particularly divisive moment in the country's history. Paring down to a quartet, *Codex* is at one a more intimate and inward-looking set of music, while still engaging with the impact of the outside world.

That's especially true of "Commonplace," the album's brooding opening track. The title refers to the sadly more recurrent cycle of violence that's become a regular and all-too-expected presence in daily news headlines. As McCarthy writes in his liner notes, events like the Columbine school shooting and Oklahoma City bombing were rare, shocking occurrences throughout the first 18 years of his life; during his second 18 years, such incidents have become terrifyingly common – words that have been proved depressingly true on more than one occasion since he wrote them, as reflected by the recent tragedy in Las Vegas.

“Elder Lion” was penned in tribute to the late James Williams, an undersung but highly influential pianist and educator. Williams was a crucial factor in McCarthy’s decision to attend William Paterson, a tenure that’s paid off in a number of opportunities since. Williams was a mentor to McCarthy as he had been to many of the artists who formed the touted Young Lions generation. “So many people have similar stories about how his kindness really sold you on the importance of and love for this music,” McCarthy says.

After Williams’ untimely passing in 2004, his role as Director of Jazz Studies at William Paterson was assumed by the great pianist Mulgrew Miller, the subject of “Miller Time,” a simmering McCarthy original. “They’d had such a close connection to one another,” McCarthy says, “if there was one person who could step into James’ role it would be Mulgrew Miller. He became a hugely influential soul for me, musically and in his approach to teaching and making everyone feel warm and welcomed.”

“Acoustic Shadows” harkens back to *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, revisiting McCarthy’s Civil War research. The title refers to an acoustic phenomenon in which witnesses close to a battle heard an eerie silence, while the guns and cannons roared loudly in places much farther from the source. McCarthy’s composition muses on the surreal idea of the sonic echoes and bizarre stillness of this strange sonic occurrence.

The next two pieces are dedicated to a pair of more distant influences, as opposed to the personal mentors of other tracks. “Serenity” is a typically memorable-but-tough melody from sax icon Joe Henderson, who McCarthy praises for having “a different way of looking at composition there that still makes me take a step back.” Claude Debussy’s singular approach sparked “Sarabande,” a grooving tune written in the classical composer’s spirit rather than style. “When you go through all the schooling that I’ve gone through, there are all these rules about what you’re not supposed to do. Debussy did all these things that people say you cannot do, and yet he made the music speak in a legitimate way while doing it.”

The influence of the mighty Clark Terry on McCarthy and his bandmates (especially Kauflin, whose relationship with the late CT was documented in the moving documentary *Keep On Keepin’ On*) can’t be overstated. “Clark Terry was the person that taught me how to speak jazz as a language, not as a math problem,” enthuses McCarthy, who expresses himself fluently in that tongue on Terry’s gently swinging “One Foot in the Gutter.”

The lovely melody of “Causeway” was written by McCarthy’s wife, and acknowledges the person that the saxophonist calls “the most significant and beautiful influence on my life in so many ways.” Finally, Cuban composer Moisés Simons’ “El Manisero” – known to many English-speaking listeners as “The Peanut Vendor” is a favorite of another mentor, trumpeter Ray Vega. A native of the South Bronx, Vega relocated to McCarthy’s hometown of Burlington, Vermont and has since become a regular collaborator and inspiration.

On *Codex*, all of these diverse elements – teachers, friends, histories, voices, tragedies – are bound together in the distinctive voices of Brian McCarthy and his gifted quartet. It only remains for the listener to delve into its rich, rewarding mysteries.

Brian McCarthy

Since graduating from William Paterson University, Brian McCarthy has played a key role in the jazz community of his native Vermont, where he lives just outside of Burlington. He released his leader debut, *This Just In*, in 2013, followed by his acclaimed reflections on the music and events of the Civil War, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*. That album was hailed by *DownBeat* in a 4 ½ star review as “a jazz album that makes a cavernous impression for its arresting beauty and conceptual brilliance.” McCarthy plays regularly with his own ensembles and alongside trumpeter Ray Vega. He is a member of the faculty at the University of Vermont, and is director of bands at Saint Michael's College.

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