

Shapes

The Big Picture

As a follow up to its auspicious debut, 2003's *The Last Farewell*, the Los Angeles collective, Shapes, who definitely rate as a band deserving wider recognition, returns with an ambitious two-cd set entitled, *The Big Picture*, that represents the full scope of its wide-ranging musicality. Once again produced by Yellowjackets bassist Jimmy Haslip, this second Shapes outing is split along stylistic lines into two discs, referred to as Reel One, containing an eclectic mix of engaging, groove-oriented material and a Reel Two, showcasing the band's more mainstream jazz side, in a program of swinging originals and inventive takes on familiar jazz standards. Taken together, both Reels offer a veritable smorgasbord for the ears -- from buoyant, upbeat melodies like 'Gabriela' and the title track, 'The Big Picture,' to the burning boppish romp 'In The Outdoors,' from the sizzling son montuno 'Eat The Heat,' to the slamming odd-metered funk of 'Lobster,' to the N'awlins flavored second line groover 'Measure One,' from the luminous ECM-ish ballad 'What Now?' and atmospheric offerings of 'Sotto Voce' and 'I Still Remember' to lush interpretations of the timeless jazz classics 'Love For Sale,' 'Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise' and 'I Didn't Know What Time It Was.'

Few bands have covered so many bases so convincingly in a single project, and this accomplished, shape-shifting ensemble does it all while still retaining its signature sound forged in the unique chemistry of Tollak Ollestad's remarkable Stevie Wonder-influenced chromatic harmonica playing and Roger Burn's vibes and piano work alongside Andy Suzuki's reeds, Matthew Von Doran's and Mike Higgins' guitars, Dave Derge's drums, Dean Taba's and Larry Steen's acoustic bass work. Special guest guitarist Robben Ford elevates the proceedings with his slash-and-burn licks on the nasty blues-tinged 'Lobster' and plays brilliantly on a startlingly fresh updating of John Coltrane's classic ballad 'Naima,' which also features former Cannonball Adderly sideman and the legendary drummer, Roy McCurdy along with pedal steel guitarist, Doug Livingston.

Elsewhere on *The Big Picture*, New York valve trombone ace Mike Fahn, adds a decidedly jazzy flair to Shapes interpretations of 'Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise' and 'Love For Sale' while also punching up the churning salsa jazz offering 'Eat The Heat' and the up-tempo burner 'In The Outdoors.' Producer Haslip appears on two tracks, playing electric bass on 'Arc Of Twilight,' which opens Reel One, and also on a remake of the Yellowjackets song, 'Automat' (from their 1998 album *Club Nocturne*). Haslip's Yellowjackets band mate and co-founder, Russell Ferrante, contributes piano, organ and synth parts on six tracks -- 'Arc of Twilight,' 'Eat The Heat,' 'Lobster,' 'Sotto Voce,' 'Automat' and a dramatic, orchestral-sounding rendition of the Rodgers & Hart chestnut 'I Didn't Know What Time It Was,' which is a wonderful example of the way Burn collaborates with his bandmates by coming up with the rhythm arrangement, yet farming out additional arrangement duties with Ferrante's string arrangement and Suzuki's reed arrangement, and all to showcase the sublime vocals of Hawaii's own, Pauline Wilson, known to many from her years with Seawind and a potent alto sax solo by Matt Catingub. Shapes' original drummer, Michael Barsimanto, also makes a cameo appearance on this cut with his trademark stellar brush work.



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Shapes

Band Biography

ROGER BURN (vibes/marimba/piano/composer/arranger) -- Originally a drummer, he attended college at Cal State, Northridge in 1980 as a percussion major and also studied with legendary drum teacher, Freddie Gruber. He later studied piano, vibes, marimba and composition with the late, great Victor Feldman. Burn's credits include appearances as a keyboardist on *The Tonight Show*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *The Today Show*, *The John Stewart Show*, *The Howie Mandel Show*, *The Magic Johnson Show*, *The Arsenio Hall Show*, *The Martin Short Show*, *Penn & Teller's Sin City*, *Motown Live*, *Lou Rawls' United Negro College Fund Show*, *The Next Big Star* with host, Ed McMahon and *The Grammy Awards* with artists such as Vanessa Williams, Lionel Richie, Lou Bega, Ashford & Simpson, The Brian Setzer Orchestra and Bryan Adams. He has also worked with Barry Manilow, Ambrosia, Chaka Kahn, Shelia E., Stevie Nicks, Richard Marx and Seal. As a session musician, he's played on motion picture soundtracks such as *The Mask*, *Another Stakeout*, *McHale's Navy*, *The Nanny*, *Freaky Friday* and *Sideways*. He has also played on gold and platinum albums, including a gold with The Brian Setzer Orchestra on *The Songs Of Westside Story*, a tribute to Leonard Bernstein and again with Setzer's orchestra on the double platinum, double Grammy-winning *Jump, Jive & Wail*. Burn also recorded with The Wild Colonial and played vibes on two tracks from former Yellowjackets and Steely Dan drummer Ricky Lawson's debut cd. He has played keyboards, piano and vibes on jingles for such brand names as Target, Cadillac, Dodge, Toyota, Acura, Peditasure and United Airlines and has also been heard on such television shows as *The Gary Shandling Show*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *The Pretender*, *Melrose Place*, *Spin City*, *Ed*, *The Drew Carey Show*, *Meet The Press*, *Politically Incorrect* and recently contributed his compositional skills to the critically acclaimed drama series *American Dreams*. His vibraphone playing can be heard on the Academy Award winning hit film, *Sideways* and is one of the principle members of the Sideways Jazz Orchestra. Roger is also a staff composer for Megatrax, one of world's largest library music houses and his compositions are heard all over the world on a daily basis. Since January of 1997 he has been an instructor at The Musicians Institute in Hollywood where he teaches courses in sight reading, how to build a keyboard rig and even a class called 'Musical Director Workshop.'

TOLLAK OLLESTAD (harmonica/vocals/composer) -- As Shapes' secret weapon, he shows remarkable command of both chromatic and blues harmonicas while also contributing vocals and compositions to the group. He has performed and or toured with Michael McDonald, Don Henley, Kenny Loggins, Jewel, Seal, Desiree, Ambrosia, Sheena Easton, Chet Atkins and Tanya Tucker. He has also recorded solos on albums for artists such as Brian McKnight, Al Jarreau, Natalie Cole, Bebe Winans, Dave Grusin, Earth, Wind & Fire, Christopher Cross, Billy Idol, Gino Vanelli, Melissa Manchester, Will Downing, Brenda Russell, John Tesh and the all girl rock group, Antigone Rising. He has appeared on a few episodes of *The Drew Carey Show* as well as having played theme music for ABC's *Good Morning America*. He also played the harmonica on the soundtrack for the popular 90's show *Northern Exposure*. Tollak released his first solo cd, *Walk The Earth*, just before moving to Holland in May of 2004. Burn says of Ollestad, "He and I met on a silly little wedding gig, back in the days when I still did drum gigs. But, it wasn't until about five years later that we really started to get to know each other. I marvel at Tollak's talent and what's really scary is, in addition to being one of the main composers for Shapes, that he's also a hell of a good piano player as well as a great singer, too. He's the perfect guy for this band and I love working with him!"

DEAN TABA (acoustic bass) -- A member of pianist David Benoit's touring band, he has also subbed for Jimmy Haslip in the Yellowjackets. Some of his other touring and performance credits include working with Kilauea, Jeff Richman, Bill Watrous, Dave Koz, Hiroshima, Tim Weisberg and Cecilia Coleman. He also leads his own acoustic jazz quintet More Is More, which features his Shapes band mate Andy Suzuki. In addition, Dean played on the soundtrack for the movie *Beethoven* and has appeared on *The Roseanne Barr Show*. Burn says of Taba, "Dean is one of my favorite bassists that I've ever heard or played with. He has the uncanny ability to play what I wrote, but then he always makes the part his own and ends up playing something much better than I could ever have written. He's a composer's dream bassist and you can set your watch to his sense of time."

MATTHEW VON DORAN (electric, acoustic guitars/composer) -- Played in the warm up house bands for *The Nanny* and *Seinfeld* and has also worked with Wayne Brady as well as smooth jazz keyboardist Scott Wilkie. He leads his own group, The Matthew Von Doran Trio, and had his solo debut, *In This Present Moment*, released May of 2004. It was produced by Jimmy Haslip and features Peter Erskine, Bob Sheppard, Terri Lynne Carrington, Derek Oles, Larry Goldings, Gary Novak, Bob Mintzer, James Genus, Marcus Baylor, Jimmy Haslip and Roger Burn. One of his secret weapons is the eleven string fretless guitar, which he plays on *In This Present Moment* and also on the track "What Now?" from *The Big Picture*. Burn says of Von Doran, "I first met Matthew on a casual; some silly wedding gig, about ten years or so ago. I recall really liking his vibe, but somehow, we just lost track of each other. Then one night, I happened to go out to a club to hear Dave Derge play, though this was long before Dave was the drummer in Shapes. Anyway, I really liked the guitar player and then it dawned on me that he was that guy that I really dug playing with from a gig all those years ago. We've been hanging out ever since. I love Matthew's writing and playing style and he's really become one of my dearest friends, too."

LARRY STEEN (acoustic bass) -- "A giant of the not too distant future," is how Leonard Feather described Larry's playing. He's released two cd's with his group, The Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble, which feature Ernie Watts, Robben Ford, Russell Ferrante and Larry's original compositions based on various musical styles from the Middle East, Asia, South and Central America as well as Africa. He has toured with Barry Manilow, Melissa Manchester, Englebert Humperdinck as well as having performed with Mel Torme, Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Eckstein, Rosemary Clooney, Stevie Wonder, Mose Allison, Eric Marienthal, Dave Weckl, Louis Bellson, Jack Sheldon, Bennie Maupin, Billy Childs, Bob Sheppard and even Jimmy Buffet and The Coasters. He has also recorded on motion picture soundtracks such as *Swingers* and played on the television shows *Roswell*, *Providence*, *Felicity*, *Once and Again*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Power Rangers*, *General Hospital*, *Entertainment Tonight* as well as on jingles for Mitsubishi, Apple Corp., Blue Cross of California and many more. Burn says of Steen, "As with most of these guys, I met Larry while we both playing for someone's wedding. I guess that there's something to be said for playing casuals. I noticed immediately that this guy was a monster! Great chops, great time...a real virtuoso. He's added another dimension to the bass chair when Dean's not been available and on top of that, he's a really nice guy and a good friend."

MIKE FAHN (valve trombone) -- Listed in the *Encyclopedia of Jazz*, circa 1990, he has a couple of solo cds to his credit as a leader. Last November, he subbed for Robin Eubanks with Michael Brecker's Quintet at The Iridium Club in New York. The late, eminent jazz critic Leonard Feather wrote that "Mike Fahn is without question one of the few masters of the valve trombone." Feather further praised Fahn for his "bronzed, burnished sound, technique and ideas to spare, with each note in the right place at the right instant." He has performed and or recorded with Maynard Ferguson, Dizzy Gillespie, Al Hirt, Chet Baker, Freddie Hubbard, Tom Harrell, Shorty Rogers, Jack Sheldon, Randy Brecker, Don Menza, Jeff "Tain" Watts, Louis Bellson, Peter Erskine, Lenny White, Al "Tootie" Heath, Eddie Daniels, Billy Childs, Larry Koonse, Robert Hurst and John Patitucci . Burn says, "I met Mike while playing together in Matt Catingub's big band. I was immediately blown away! If you cloned Freddie Hubbard, Bob Brookmeyer and John Scofield, I think that Mike's sound would be the result."

ANDY SUZUKI (reeds/reed arrangements) -- A member of David Benoit's touring band, he's also performed, toured and or recorded with Dave Brubeck, Carl Anderson, Cecilia Noel, Hiroshima, Kilauea, Rick Braun, Pat Kelley and Grant Geissman. His film and television credits include *George of The Jungle* as well as *Northern Exposure*, *Beverly Hills 90210* as well as shows on Nickelodeon, The Spice and The Playboy Channels. He released his second solo cd earlier this year. He's an integral part of Shapes with his exquisite reed arrangements, incorporating flutes, alto flutes, clarinets, bass clarinet as well as soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxophones. Says Burn, "His arrangements are perfect because I prefer to not lean on the crutch of using synthesizers to create lush pads. I could have done all of the arrangements myself, but Andy has a perfect sense of what's needed and as a composer/arranger himself, he seems to know what I want and then gives me something even better. We have a great working chemistry, not to mention that it's nice to spread out the work load. He's also a monster player and I'll never follow him in the solo order, that's for sure!"

DAVE DERGE (drums/co-composer) -- A former member of the David Benoit band, he has also toured, performed and or recorded with Shawn Colvin, Richard Thompson, The Bone Shakers, The Brian Setzer Orchestra, Clare Fisher, Ernie Watts, Scott Wilkie, Mark Murphy, Larry Carlton and once, for a week while in college, was the drummer with Cannonball Adderly's group while doing jazz clinics in the U.S. He has played on many television shows including *Star Trek - The Next Generation*. He also co-wrote 'Lobster' on Shapes' new cd, *The Big Picture*. He's also co-led the critically acclaimed jazz group, Dark Horses, with guitarist Barry Coats. As Burn says, "I couldn't figure out the meter for 'Lobster' until Dave figured out the "secret code" to the darn thing as far as how the drums should play. He's an ace and real pleasure to work with."

MIKE HIGGINS (acoustic, electric guitars/composer) -- One of the main composers for Shapes, he wrote the title tracks for the first Shapes cd, *The Last Farewell*, and the group's latest release, *The Big Picture*. He's toured, performed and or recorded with Dizzy Gillespie, Maynard Ferguson, Bernadette Peters, Weird Al Yankovic, Blood, Sweat & Tears, John Patitucci, Max Roach, Flora Purim, Michael Tilson Thomas and the Bill Watrous big band. His television and film credits include *The Bob Newhart Show*, *The Today Show* and the motion picture *Boiling Point*. Burn says, "Mike's style is interesting because just when you think you've got him pegged as more of an up tempo, mega chops specialist, he'll play a ballad and it'll stop you in your tracks. His sense of melody is really beautiful."

Shapes Quotes

✚ *"I've been playing 'The Last Farewell' for a few months and have often said on air that Shapes could possibly be the next super group. It's seldom that we get a CD that is so musical that every track is playable and I do play all the tracks."*

Don Gordon, KIPO, Honolulu, HI

✚ *"I thoroughly enjoyed producing 'The Last Farewell'. It's a wonderful body of work by a great band and some great guests including Flora Purim, Airto Moreira, Walfredo Reyes Jr., Russell Ferrante and myself. This beautiful project speaks for itself."*

Jimmy Haslip – The Yellowjackets

✚ *"Tollak is a multi-threat on today's scene as composer, keyboardist, vocalist. I am very impressed with his playing and composing. His musicianship goes from jazz to rock AND he plays blues AND chromatic harp!! A superficial analysis shows allegiance to Stevie Wonder, but he really has "his own thing," very impressive!! 'Night Bloom' is beautiful and all of the musicians are great! It shows fresh harmony. We all can learn and expect a lot from Tollak!"*

Toots Thielemans – Harmonica Player

✚ *"Shapes illuminates the essence of musical synergies in the ensemble's wide arc of creative expression. From traditional roots and idioms to exploratory edges, the original pieces contributed by Roger Burn, Michael Higgins and Tollak Ollestad add to the allure and listener-friendliness of this standout CD!"*

Dr. Herb Wong – Past-President, IAJE (International Assn. Of Jazz Education)

✚ *"The new Shapes CD, 'The Last Farewell', is fresh, alive, musical and filled with all the elements of good music and jazz. It is also beautifully produced. My compliments to Roger Burn."*

John Pisano – Legendary L.A. Session Guitarist

✚ *"'The Last Farewell' may sound like an odd title for a debut recording, but after listening to their fresh and unique sounds, I'm convinced that the group "Shapes" is definitely here to stay."*

Afro American Syndicate

✚ *"True to their name, Shapes takes some fanciful twists on all conventional definitions of jazz, stirring up a visionary blend of mainstream bop, bossa nova, sambas, pop ballads and even a hint of (gasp!) country music. Focused on the joy of making music, these top L.A. cats--produced by world-class bassist Jimmy Haslip--have a blast, go wild, jam heartily and create something truly transcendent."*

Jonathan Widran – Jazziz Magazine

✚ *"Shapes is the kind of band that I would pay to go and see play the music that I love. Their treatment of the tunes that they played was intense and provocative. I dare say that I was impressed."*

James Janisse – KKJZ FM 88.1 Program Host

✚ *This outfit succeeds at dispelling the occasional prejudices associated with commercially oriented, radio friendly jazz, where the musicians' collective, and widely accessible methodologies highlight the superior level of musicianship displayed from within."*

Glenn Astarita – All Music Guide