



## SOULFUL CONVERSATIONS



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Written by:  
**BUSTER MAXWELL**  
The Antfarm Quartet  
"Dialogues, pt. 2"

Jazz players pride themselves on their willingness to *listen* to each other, which opens up the possibility of conjuring up the *magic mojo*, that indefinable quality of *feel, groove, or soul*. The truth is that rarely, even in professional jazz ensemble playing is a confident collective vision summoned up so solidly that the performance becomes transcendent, elevated to the legendary *grooveland*. But there is a rare kind of communication, both inner and outer, on display in this new release by the Antfarm Quartet. An... attunement. No small wonder that the CD is entitled *Dialogues*.

Basically, this is a delightful piece of work, a true collaboration by accomplished musicians who obviously love what they do. But can you dance to it? Or is that a banal parameter to impose on contemporary jazz? Not if you want your audience to snap fingers, tap feet and bob heads, responses which this CD generates with ease. You can samba, slow dance, or just relax to this one. Regardless of its deep and nourishing complexity, *Dialogues* never refuses to speak to the body.

This relentless romanticism comes courtesy of Paul Jost's stunning singing. His burnished, soulful vocals are remarkable - rhythmically and tonally spot on, daringly inventive and freely expressive in true jazz tradition, but uniquely his own. In both the charted vocalization (wordless vocals) and his improvised scatting, Jost's musical soul shines, and it's simply thrilling to hear. Today, when the true male jazz singer has taken a media back seat to hordes of semi-talented Sinatra soundalikes and R&B wannabes, Jost nearly single-handedly reclaims the male voice as a valid and critically important jazz instrument.

He swings breezily, scats with ease and authority, and softly seduces the listener with a catchy combination of the crystalline soulfulness of Sting and the fearless inventiveness of Mark Murphy. If that comparison seems somewhat glib, just listen to him soar and you'll soon realize what a remarkable accomplishment it is for an original jazz vocalist today to be both accessible *and* deep.

And though he may occasionally treat the lyric as a simple steppingstone to an uplifting flight of melodic invention, Jost's dramatic, whispery *recitative* during the band's surprising deconstruction of the Rogers and Hart chestnut, *I Didn't Know What Time It Was*, is a subtle example of how a sensitive singer can literally breathe new life into the words of an outdated tune that has been somewhat flattened by time.

Underneath all this lyric romanticism, a trio rambles along in a series of graceful grooves. Bassist Tim Lekan, pianist Jim Ridl, and drummer Bob Shomo play in relaxed harmony like the old friends they are. And although the polished arrangements are elegant examples of jazz trio invention, the listener is often surprised by small touches - the soft cymbal crash that instinctively punctuates a line of improvised scat, the piano phrasing that pushes and pulls the band along a wave of orchestration, and ringing bass tones that can create a brooding atmosphere.

Ridl is a true trio keyboardist, and his playing is noteworthy here for what he doesn't, as well as does, play. Confidently sublimating his ample chops for the overall craftsmanship of each track, he's happy to let bass, drums and vocal sail along while he slips in sly punctuation with spare phrasing and chunks of delicious chords.

Lekan revels in revealing new shades of his talent with each track. He's that rare breed of bassist that can play swiftly yet sonorously: and although

his rhythm work is righteous, he's most effecting in the lowest registers, where his shadings lend a magisterial acoustic, notably in the slower pieces.

Shomo is rarely less than impeccable. His cymbal playing has a particular precision that allows him to flavor each track with colors and textures that rise to a Elvin Jones-style sense of tonality. Above all, he drives the band, but never overstates his case nor underplays. He's not just in the pocket, he *is* the pocket.

Along with other delightful reinterpretations on this CD, who knew that *Put On A Happy Face* could swing so mightily? Antfarm might have taken a cue from Tony Bennett's lighthearted 1962 Carnegie Hall arrangement, but shoots the song straight into the swing stratosphere, propelling the musical comedy war-horse wildly forward under their own rhythmic delirium.

Other highlights include the band's re-imagining of *Centerpiece*, where Ridl's voicings add atmospheric colors one never imagines a blues classic could have; a tender interpretation of Lennon and McCartney's *And I Love Her*; a kicking version of Joe Henderson's *Tetragon*; and two impressive originals: Ridl's contemplative *Sun On My Hands* and Lekan's sweetly swinging title track are so evocative, they can raise many images in the imagination, but remain steadfastly strong as enveloping soundscapes. Led by Jost's softly soulful vocalizations, both bear repeated listening.

What are the secret inbred

agreements that allow a group to communicate so deeply? True friendship, shared idols, the commonality of generation, a wealth of experience onstage together? All of this and more Antfarm seems to bring to this intimate performance - these *Dialogues* are one set of soulful conversations that you'll want to eavesdrop on many times over.

*Buster Maxwell is a Pittsburgh performer, songwriter and playwright who discovered the Antfarm Quartet performing in Stone Harbor in 2005, and has been a fan ever since.*



(Antfarm Quartet is a New Jersey based ensemble featuring Jim Ridl (piano), Paul Jost (vocals & harmonica), Tim Lekan (bass), and Bob Shomo (drums). Their latest release, "Dialogues pt.2" is on Dreambox Media and is available at the following locations; [www.dreamboxmedia.com](http://www.dreamboxmedia.com), [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), [www.digstation.com](http://www.digstation.com), [www.cdbaby.com](http://www.cdbaby.com). For more about Antfarm Quartet, visit their website, [www.antfarmquartet.com](http://www.antfarmquartet.com) )

