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## **On the Inside Looking Out On *Windows*, Tim Ray opens his heart and soul to his heroes**

It is difficult to argue against the tradition of the piano trio. So says Tim Ray, in what amounts to an interesting if profound understatement. Ironically, Ray's Whaling City Sound debut is itself profound, but not in an understated way at all. *Windows*, his first recording in two decades, is classic piano trio in the tradition of Ray's heroes, including Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett and Herbie Hancock. "The central idea of this disc is to acknowledge the pianists who were my early influences, and to recapture this feeling of being introduced to great trio music."

That list also includes icons like Ellington, Silver, Monk and Evans. The heart and soul of these players form the core of *Windows*. "Each great artist has his own approach to melody, harmony and rhythm," he says, "and while over time I may have gravitated to one more than another, together they've provided the foundation for my own approach."

Of course, in this format, the rest of the trio deserves equal billing. In fact, Ray will be the first one to admit that his accompanists, John Lockwood and Mark Walker, are critical to the finished product. "They are great communicators," says Ray, "and everything about trio playing has to do with how well you can communicate with each other."

Lockwood, Walker and Ray first played together when they backed Greg Abate, an alto great that has used the trio on two of his Whaling City Sound albums, including *Kindred Spirits: Live at Chan's* with the late Phil Woods. The trio credits Abate for allowing them to discover the potency, and chemistry, they possessed in support. In fact, one of Abate's tunes on the live recording, "Speak Low," featured the trio without Abate, essentially serving as their debut together.

*Windows* continues that tactile performance. The song list is impressive, but the trio succeeds in meeting the enormous potential of classic material. Hancock's "Toys," Jarrett's "So Tender," Monk's "Monk's Dream," Horace Silver's "Peace," and Ellington's "I'm Beginning to See the Light," begins the short list of authentic, reverent and customized readings of some of the greatest ever piano trio standards. Ray even recalls his road years with Lyle Lovett's "I've Been to Memphis."

The trio adds its own flair to the recording with a few original compositions, Ray's "De-Train", "Joy" and Lockwood's "12 by 7," both of which fit beautifully into the overall mix, with rhythmic tricks and creative improvisation.

Tim Ray has taught at Berklee. He's toured with Lovett, Canadian chanteuse Jane Siberry, and others. He has surprised and awed us in Tre Corda with Eugene Friesen (cello) and trumpeter Greg Hopkins. But he is truly in his element leading a piano trio, sharing the stage with Walker and Lockwood, and paying honest and genuine tribute to those that came before, to those that set his passion alight with great piano music themselves. *Windows* is a look into that intimate world.