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# FRANK CARLBERG

## JAZZ PIANIST AND COMPOSER

**“melodic, challenging,  
intelligent, and  
fiercely original...”**

Jazz pianist and composer Frank Carlberg's most recent release on Red Piano Records, *The American Dream* (2009) has drawn critical acclaim including *The Hartford Courant* who called it "...melodic, challenging, intelligent, and fiercely original." *The American Dream*, a 12-part song cycle with settings of poetry by Robert Creeley was commissioned by Chamber Music America and was called "...a masterful feast of music that suggests a beautiful portrait of Creeley's poetry -- joyous, reflective, plaintive, hopeful, and always radiating with great humanity" in *All About Jazz*.

Originally a native of Helsinki, Finland, Frank Carlberg has carved himself quite a niche in the New York jazz community. As a leader, Frank's groups include the Frank Carlberg Quintet (performing settings of a wide variety of texts including poems by poets), the Tivoli Trio (a classic jazz piano trio playing an eclectic mix of Carlberg's compositions drawn from cinematic and circus inspirations) and the Frank Carlberg Big Band (performing original compositions as well as arrangements and re-compositions of standards and folk materials).

His own bands aside, the Brooklyn-based pianist has been involved in many crossover projects throughout the years. Some of his most notable collaborations have included performances and recordings with the likes of saxophonist Steve Lacy, trombonist Bob Brookmeyer and trumpeter Kenny Wheeler. He has been commissioned to write music for big bands, small ensembles, symphony orchestras as well as modern dance companies. In addition to his playing and composing activities Carlberg also serves on the faculty at both New England Conservatory and Berklee College of Music. He is also a member of the Douglass Street Music Collective and a partner in Red Piano Records, an artist run cooperative label.

After receiving his Bachelor's degree from Berklee College of Music in Boston, Carlberg received a Master's degree from the New England Conservatory of Music. While at the Conservatory, he came under the influence of jazz masters such as Paul Bley, Ran Blake, Geri Allen and Jimmy Giuffre. The music and thinking of these musicians had a profound impact on Carlberg and set him on a path in search of a personal expression.

Carlberg's first recording as a leader, *Blind Drive*, was a trio effort consisting of mostly original compositions. It was through this recording that Carlberg's music initially caught the attention of the critics. Jon Andrews describes the CD in *DownBeat* as "sophisticated, approachable music played with both freedom and discipline". Carlberg's next recording, *Ugly Beauty*, was a duo recording with vocalist Christine Correa -- the first of many collaborations. *Ugly Beauty* featured a mix of folk music (Indian and Finnish) as well as free improvisations, original compositions and jazz repertoire reflecting the eclecticism and influence of Ran Blake. The next CD, *The Crazy Woman*, was of particular importance for Carlberg's artistic development, as he began his extended quest in setting music to poetry. The material consisted of 11 original songs composed to texts by 20th century poets such as Jack Kerouac and Anna Akhmatova. The recording featured a quintet format, which was to become the core of several future projects. On his following recording, *Variations on a Summer Day*, Carlberg chose to highlight one poet and one extended poem. Out of Wallace Stevens' poem, Carlberg created a song cycle consisting of 13 parts. For *In the Land of Art*, the music again featured settings to poetry, this time by Robert Creeley, Anselm Hollo, Kenneth Rexroth and others.

One of Carlberg's most fruitful collaborations has been the duo project with another Finnish expatriate New Yorker, drummer/composer Klaus Suonsaari. In rapid succession, the friends have recorded two duo albums, *Offering* and *Fallingwater*. In his *Downbeat* review for *Offering*, Bill Milkowski described the axis of the Carlberg-Suonsaari as "two kindred spirits that demonstrate an easy chemistry together, marked by a healthy blend of humor and fearlessness."

In 2004 Carlberg was commissioned to write two pieces, "Heaven" and a re-composition of "I Got Rhythm", for a special release by Fresh Sound Records; *The Sound of New York Jazz Underground* -- a double CD set featuring music by eight composers associated with the label. Mark Sabbatini described these pieces in *All About Jazz* in the following way: "Gershwin inherits a Hummer on Frank Carlberg's tour of I Got Rhythm; a dark series of abruptly shifting free segments. 'Heaven' takes a poem by Robert Creeley and gives it an 'Andrew-Lloyd-Webber-pens-acid-jazz-for-the-circus' spin".

The CD *State of the Union* made more pointed political statements and uses cut-up versions of The Bill of Rights as well as pre recorded looped parts. There is also a setting of an excerpt from Bill Clinton's grand jury testimony during the Lewinsky episode.

Carlberg's plans for the immediate future include more European and US touring in support of *The American Dream*; recording a new album for the Tivoli Trio; and more interdisciplinary collaborations.



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## recent press

"***The American Dream*** (2009) is one of those rare recordings that challenges as much as it entertains. Carlberg and Correa really nail the feeling and intent behind Creeley's verse... Carlberg, Correa, Hebert, Cheek, and Sarin turn in some amazing individual and ensemble performances -- some of the playing here just left me shaking my head in pleased disbelief. Highly recommended."

>> Dave Wayne, jazzreview.com

"...a masterful job blending the music and words, the results sounding so organic. The melodies wrap around the words with ease and the solos never seem obligatory. His music is melodic, challenging, intelligent, and fiercely original. Many projects that attempt to blend poetry with creative music sound stilted but, over his career, Carlberg has proven that one can take these two art forms and make something quite special."

>> Richard Kamins, The Hartford Courant

"Carlberg's... sympathetic and almost telepathic interplay with Correa -- who charges these poems with her sensual vocals but also alternates with casual delivery -- is simply arresting. His trusty and tight interplay with all the musicians turns this suite into a masterful feast of music that suggests a beautiful portrait of Creeley's poetry -- joyous, reflective, plaintive, hopeful, and always radiating with great humanity."

>> Eyal Hareuveni, All About Jazz

"...an existential landscape perfectly suited for interpreting Creeley's craggy, downtrodden, realistic words that shred dreams, hope, disillusion, and fear into smaller components that beg to be exploded by a simple twist of fate, stereotype, or resolution of human spirit. It's that delicate balance of skepticism and eternal forward motion that identifies what the band, and especially Correa, does with these musings on life in our dysfunctional nation... A musical and artistic triumph... it puts an emphatic period on his career, and a big feather in Carlberg's cap."

>> Michael G. Nastos, allmusic

"...for those who long for jazz music of compositional and improvisational substance that goes beyond the pale; this is a statement not to be missed."

>> Thomas R. Erdmann, jazzreview.com

"The jazz on this marvelous little CD is absolutely astounding... I give it a MOST HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!"

>> Dick Metcalf, Improvijazzation Nation

### ***State of the Union*** (2006)

"That his music can transport such weight on the same wings that convey the metaphysical spirit of other texts is testament to solid instincts, to his continual discovery of how to hear the whole world through his art."

>> Jason Weiss, Shuffle Boil -- a magazine for poets and musicians

### ***In the Land of Art*** (2003)

"...What makes this work so well is that Carlberg and his bandmates have a keen sense for that which Allen Ginsberg termed 'spontaneous bop prosody' -- the variations in pitch and rhythm that served as the basis for the beat's art. Christine Correa's exquisitely expressive voice alternates between poet and instrument on these cuts while saxmen Chris Cheek and Andrew Rathbun showcase instrumental and interpretative abilities that are wide ranging."

"on-the-mark musical, vocal and piano interpretations, adventurous rhythm section explorations and expressive dual sax playing."

>> Elliott Simon, All About Jazz

### ***Variations on a Summer Day*** (2000)

"Frank Carlberg sculpts Monk and other jazz standards by brilliantly spacing the musical materials, which make him one of the truest interpreters of the repertoire today. To begin with, he swings incessantly with precision, stubbornness and power. He reflects on each note, implies the obvious, emphasizes the surprises."

>> Philip Meziat, Jazz Magazine