

THE LARRY STEEN WORLD JAZZ ENSEMBLE

“A giant of the not too distant future,” declared the esteemed, late jazz critic Leonard Feather of composer/bassist/producer Larry Steen who has just released his highly anticipated, second CD *View From Afar* (<http://LarrySteen.iuma.com>). Unlike most jazz artists, Steen creates his music by fusing the authentic rhythms and textures of various world cultures with the complex chordal harmony prevalent in jazz and classical music.

“What I’m trying to do in my music is mix Near Eastern, Balkan, West African, Celtic, Caribbean and South American music concepts with a deep harmonic sense not usually associated with music from these regions.” Steen has a deep respect for the various cultures throughout the world, so with the intention of preserving each culture’s essence, he is careful to duplicate its rhythms and textures as accurately as possible. This can be seen in his use of such exotic instruments as the *oud* (fretless lute), *bouzouki* (fretted lute with long neck), *duduk* (double reed, wind instrument), *kawala* (reed flute), *cavaqhino* (similar to ukelele), Uilleann pipes and a multitude of percussion instruments along with standard Western instruments. The result is a rich melange of “world jazz” that is ethnically authentic yet interpreted and composed in an entirely new way. Although electric and acoustic basses are his main instruments, Steen usually composes on piano in order to best utilize his extensive knowledge of harmony, thus showcasing his unique style.

In creating *View From Afar*, Steen enlisted not only the talents of jazz luminaries Ernie Watts, Robben Ford and Russell Ferrante (of The Yellowjackets), but of notable “world” musicians as well who originate from Russia, Greece, Armenia, Israel, Lebanon, Brazil and Venezuela. The ten tracks of the recording were composed, arranged and produced entirely by Steen with the exception of two that were cowritten with pianist Tamir Hendelman (featured on the CD), another that was coproduced with woodwind player Katisse Buckingham (also featured), and three others that were arrangements stemming from traditional sources.

Prior to producing his two solo efforts, Steen made a name for himself in Los Angeles music circles as a remarkably versatile instrumentalist. His ability to excel on both fretted and fretless electric bass along with jazz and classical double bass brought him tour work with such top name entertainers as Barry Manilow, Melissa Manchester and Engelbert Humperdinck. He has also performed with a variety of artists, including Mel Torme, Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Eckstine, Rosemary Clooney, Stevie Wonder, Mose Allison, Eric Marienthal, Dave Weckl, Louis Bellson, Jack Sheldon, Bennie Maupin, Billy Childs, Bob Sheppard, Jimmy Buffet, the Coasters, Cameroonian pop star Prince Eyango and renowned Persian pop singers Ebi and Dariush... to name a few. He is a member of Hollywood Klezmer (formerly the Brandeis-Bardin International Klezmer Ensemble), a double bass soloist featured two years in a row with the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony, and an orchestra bassist who has performed with the Broadway touring companies of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s “Music of the Night” (starring Melissa Manchester and Betty Buckley), “Forty-Second Street,” and the Civic Light Opera of South Bay Cities.

His recording credits include the film "Swingers" and various independents, CDs such as *The Stan Kenton 50th Anniversary Celebration: Back to Balboa* (with Frank Strazzeri and Bill Perkins) and *The Songs of G.H.* (Disney Records), as well as numerous television and radio spots that include *Roswell*, *Providence*, *Felicity*, *Once and Again*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Power Rangers*, *General Hospital*, *Entertainment Tonight*, A.B.C./Disney library music, *Mitsubishi*, *Apple Computers*, *Blue Cross of California* and *Contadina*. He also has recorded “on spec” for the Verve and A&M record labels.

In 1988, Steen won first place in the International Society of Bassists' Jazz Competition after graduating Magna Cum Laude in Studio Music and Jazz from the University of Miami where, aside from his rigorous jazz curriculum, he studied classical double bass with Lucas Drew. His undergraduate studies also included two years at the esteemed Berklee College of Music in Boston. He continued his education at the California Institute of the Arts (CALARTS), where he studied with celebrated bassists Gary Willis and Jeff Berlin, receiving a Master of Fine Arts degree in Jazz and African-American Music Performance. Other honors include the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) annual Special Award granted to him every year since 1997 and being a finalist in the Jazz Composer Alliance's 2001 Julius Hemphill Composition Awards.

"I believe that music is an expression of ourselves, of humanity. It transcends language and national borders. This explains why one can be so moved by a vocalist singing in a foreign language that one doesn't understand... because on a deeper level, one does understand. Music is the expression of life's beauty... it's not always pretty, and it's certainly not perfect. I like to think that my music encompasses these different dynamics. I hope people will be moved in some way by my music... ideally on all three levels - the intellectual, emotional and spiritual. I want their everyday existence to be uplifted. Music is so powerful in its ability to promote spirituality or interconnectedness. By bringing together the music of various cultures throughout the world, I hope I can make a difference in bringing the world a bit closer together."

In addition to the world music mentioned earlier, Steen cites influences of The Yellowjackets, Wayne Shorter, Joe Zawinul, Jean-Luc Ponty ("Tchokola" recording), the Brecker Brothers, Pat Metheny, Oregon, Chick Corea, Trilok Gurtu and Billy Childs. He also listens to classical music (Debussy, Chopin, Stravinsky, Bartok, to name a few) as well as funk-R&B and pop (especially James Brown, Parliament-Funkadelic, Sting, Seal and Level 42). Bassists he admires include John Patitucci, Marcus Miller, James Jamerson, Jaco Pastorius, Eddie Gomez and Marc Johnson, as well as bebop pioneers Paul Chambers, Ray Brown and Oscar Pettiford. "It only makes sense that my music is a natural progression [in the evolution of jazz]."

When not busy with the Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble, Steen freelances as a studio and live musician in a variety of styles and teaches part time at the Musician's Institute (MI) in Hollywood, California, privately, and as a clinician. He resides in Hollywood and enjoys numerous hobbies, including photography, travel and nature.

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LarrySteen.iuma.com

CRITICS RAVE!!

“...a giant of the not too distant future. Steen is a young, limber bassist whose works sparkled with fresh ideas.”

Los Angeles Times

“The wide range of instrumental colors, exotic rhythms and time signatures, along with the high musicianship, make this [*View From Afar*] a highly recommended recording...”

“...expertly played by the well-rehearsed band, unusual and consistently intriguing.”

“Bassist Larry Steen has come up with an interesting and viable bridge between the two genres [fusion and ethnic music] that’s not over done from either aspect.”

“...Steen himself who most amazes with lyricism that belies his young age. For the contemporary jazz fan, this [*First Move*] is a delightful effort on the part of a musician who we are bound to hear more from.”

L.A. Jazz Scene

“...a well-rehearsed and colorful group, which is both funky and explorative, [The Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble] is carving out its own unique niche.”

Music Connection

“...he composes real songs, not just bass solos set to rhythm tracks. This CD [*First Move*] is well worth the money.”

Bass Frontiers Magazine

“What sets Steen apart is his first-hand understanding of many different idioms.”

Jazziz Magazine

“...he is always there, with strong tunes and a confident tone. The Latin tunes burst with a fervor, in the lines and the way they’re played.”

The Green Mountain Jazz Messenger

“...he’s clearly an accomplished player and composer...”

Bass Player Magazine

“Keep your eye out for projects with Steen on them, they look like they could be a lot of musical fun.”

Bassics Magazine

“Larry Steen, acoustic and electric bass player extraordinaire...”

Entertainment Today

JazzTimes®

AMERICA'S JAZZ MAGAZINE

December 2003

View From Afar (LMS), by the **Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble**, is a Vulcan mind meld of dissimilar sonic backgrounds. The bassist and leader assumes the role of a musical fashion designer, with his own line of complex Western classical and jazz harmonic chordal garments, using various ethnic rhythmic and melodic traditions as his runway models. Central Asian motifs, with virtuoso dumbek percussive interchanges, Steen's lithe funky bass groove march and added bousouki single-note picking is there for all to see in the Greek "Horiatiki Salata." Dreamy and otherworldly is the atmospheric result of drum 'n' bass and Balinese barong dance mixing with a smoothed sax, Steen's fretless bass, fruitful programming and acute keyboarding. "Whelan's Jig," of Irish, Cameroonian and Western stock, furthers the case for Steen's handiness with electric bass as well as his composing and arranging. But perhaps "Karshlama Blues," where the West meets the Middle East in a blues middle, is an even better model of the attractiveness of this type of 21st-century world-jazz fusion.

L.A.

JAZZ
SCENETHE LARRY STEEN WORLD
JAZZ ENSEMBLE*View From Afar*

(self-produced)

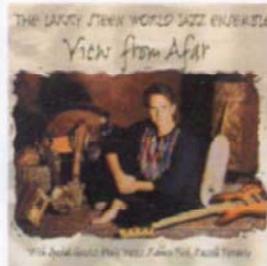
To be fair, World Jazz has to capture the ear of folks from all over. Listeners from Afghanistan and Pakistan should be just as excited about the music as listeners from Ireland and Canada. Bassist and composer Larry Steen combines established and well-known musical idioms from around the world with Mainstream Jazz and Blues. So, an audience in Turkey or Haiti, for example, will recognize a part of its cultural heritage here and there in Steen's program. This, his second CD, includes authentic material from Caribbean, Near Eastern, Balkan, West African, Celtic and South American cultures. Your thoughts immediately flow through the cold, clear north of Europe, the distant, dry down-under of the South, the exotic flavors of the Orient, and the total circumference of the ancient Mediterranean. There are cameo appearances from special guests Ernie Watts, Russell Ferrante and Robben Ford. Highlights include Doug Webb's luscious tenor solos on "Karshlama Blues" and "Dervishland,"

continued on next page

September 2003

continued from previous page

Jimmy Mahlis' wild electric guitar solo on "Whelan's Jig" and thrilling bouzouki feature on "Horiatiki Salata," Katisse Buckingham's fluid tenor solo in the exotic "Drum 'n Barong," Leo Chelyapov's prominent clarinet voice through the rhythmic "Misirlou," Chris Wabich's steel drum coloring on "View From Afar," and the eclectic percussion timbres supplied throughout the program by Brad Dutz. Steen's acoustic and electric basses provide both the program's foundation and several exciting solo spots. Two thumbs up for a broad-minded approach to World Jazz that remains both culturally authentic and true to Jazz and Blues. —*Jim Santella*



**THE LARRY
STEEN WORLD
JAZZ ENSEMBLE**
View From Afar
LMS Records

With a musicians list that runs into the twenty plus range (hence no listing), bassist Larry Steen has focused on World Music in the truest sense of the term. Steen has assembled musicians from such diverse cultures as Russia, Greece, Armenia, Israel, Lebanon, Brazil and Venezuela and combined them with jazz greats like Ernie Watts, Robben Ford and Russell Ferante. The tracks explore complex rhythmic traditions from all over the world from the opening Celtic feel of 'Whelan's Jig' to the Middle Eastern flavour of 'Dervishland' and the Brazilian style of 'Second Wind'. Do you know what a Karshlama is? How about a Chiftitell? Now's your chance to find out, it's certainly worth exploring!

The Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble

WHELAN'S JIG

From *View From Afar* [LMS Records]

"A giant of the not-too-distant future" declared the distinguished, late jazz critic Leonard Feather of bassist/composer/producer Larry Steen. In 1988, Steen won the International Society of Bassists' Jazz Competition after completing a Bachelor of Music degree (Magna Cum Laude) in Studio Music and Jazz from the University of Miami in Florida and attending the world-renowned Berklee College of Music in Boston. Since then, he has received a Master of Fine Arts degree in Jazz and African-American Music Performance from the California Institute of the Arts (CALARTS) and has performed live and in the studio with artists that include Ella Fitzgerald, Mel Torme, Dave Weckl, Eric Marienthal, Bob Sheppard, Mose Allison, Billy Eckstine, Benny Maupin, Billy Childs, Rosemary Clooney, Louis Bellson, Jimmy Buffet and others.



He has also recorded extensively for film, television, radio, and on CDs which include his own ASCAP award winning, world jazz releases *First Move* and *View From Afar*. Jimmy Haslip (of

Yellowjackets) was the executive producer of *First Move*, which features jazz luminaries Ernie Watts, Dave Weckl and Jeff Beal. The highly anticipated, new CD fuses authentic Near Eastern, Balkan, West African, Celtic, Caribbean and South American influences with jazz, classical and funk and features Ernie Watts, Robben Ford and Russell Ferrante.

About "Whelan's Jig": "The concept of my world jazz ensemble is to fuse the authentic rhythms and textures of a specific ethnic style with the complex chordal harmony prevalent in jazz and classical music. However, with this arrangement I took it a step further by injecting another "world" groove.

"We initially play 'Whelan's Jig' as a traditional Irish jig played with traditional Celtic instruments consisting of Uilleann pipes, wooden flute, penny whistle and bodhran. After the first melody statement, a bikutsi groove from Cameroon (West Africa) begins and the melody is played in the same tempo but with this new feel. In a fashion typical of African music, the melody and rhythm is felt as two simultaneous rhythms at once. It's 6/8 and 3/4! To all of this, I added the jazz stylistic aspects of complex, modal harmony and improvised solos, including mine on my Sadowsky 5-string bass." — Larry Steen

To hear more tracks from *View From Afar* or to purchase the CD, go to <http://LarrySteen.iuma.com>. It can also be found in stores through Burnside Distribution Corporation (<http://bcdistribution.com>).



Featured Artist: The Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble

CD Title: View From Afar **Year:** 2003 **Record Label:** LMS Records **Style:** World Music

Musicians: Larry Steen (basses), Quinn Johnson (keyboards), Jimmy Mahlis (guitars, bouzouki, oud), Chris Wabich (Drums), Brad Dutz (Percussion). Guests include Robben Ford (electric guitar), Ernie Watts (soprano sax, flute), Russell Ferrante (Piano), various others on ethnic instruments

Review: The fusion of world music with jazz is nothing new. Artists such as Herbie Hancock, Anouar Brahem and Dino Saluzzi have been mixing up elements of musical styles from various countries for years. What makes the Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble's latest release, *View From Afar*, different than the rest is that rather than focusing on the music of a particular culture, Steen and his group take us on a virtual audio travelogue. The ensemble blends music from countries as diverse as Ireland, Armenia, Brazil, and elsewhere with a contemporary jazz sound that is sometimes fusion, sometimes funk/R&B, sometimes drum 'n bass, sometimes samba. While the styles vary, there is a sense of the constant, a unity that somehow transcends it all.

The ensemble consists of Steen on various acoustic and electric basses; Quinn Johnson on keyboards; Jimmy Mahlis on guitar; Chris Wabich on drums; and Brad Dutz on a variety of traditional as well as ethnic percussion instruments. Together they form a core which maintains a unity of sound that threads its way throughout the program. The group is supplemented by a number of guests who play traditional instruments such as duduk, bouzouki, ney, cavaquino, and kawala.

Not content to merely marry specific cultural styles with contemporary jazz, the group mixes and matches cultural ideas, often within the same piece. Take the CD opening track, "Whelan's Jig", where a traditional Irish jig, complete with Uilleann pipes, Irish wooden flutes and the bodhrán are combined with a Cameroonian polyrhythmic *bikutsi* groove and, as the liner notes say: "voila!...World Jazz"

"Drum 'n Barong" mixes the Balinese gamelan orchestra *Barong Dance* with a drum 'n bass groove and, again, you have something new yet somehow familiar.

"Second Wind", featuring Russell Ferrante (of the Yellowjackets) on piano, Robben Ford on guitar and Ernie Watts on flute, marries the *partido alto* feel with modern and traditional *choro*.

Each track represents a trip, and the whole album represents an entire journey. Solos are integrated into the compositions, reminding one of the compositions of Pat Metheny and Lyle Mays.

The album is completely written, arranged and produced by Steen, who plays with taste and a stylistic breadth that is not easy to find. With a strong conception that allows an album of such diverse influences to come together as a unified whole, *View From Afar* will hopefully garner even more attention than the World Jazz Ensemble's previous award-winning album, *First Move*. Highly recommended.

Tracks: Whelan's Jig, Karshlama Blues, Drum 'n Barong, Shoshanat Ha'Erev, Dervishland, Horiatiki Salata, Second Wind, Misirlou, View From Afar, Away in the Sycamores

Artist's Website: http://www.iuma.com/IUMA/Bands/Steen,_Larry/

Reviewed by: [Dave Binder](#)

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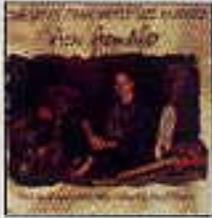


LARRY STEEN WORLD JAZZ ENSEMBLE

View From Afar [LMS Records,
LarrySteen.iuma.com]

Bassist/composer Steen assembles a large cast of supporting players from around the globe to create a rich multicultural musical tapestry. His clever blend of divergent elements from Ireland, Cameroon, Turkey, Brazil, Bali, Israel, Trinidad, and other locales creates the feeling that these textures have always belonged together. Steen's playing is solid and subdued on electric and upright, but he steps out for a moody fretless solo on "Shoshanat Haí Erev" and a slapfest solo that evolves into some serious melodic chops on "Horiatiki Salata." He ups the ante with his gorgeous arco introduction on "Away in the Sycamores"; a blistering pizzicato solo follows, which should satisfy anyone's curiosity about Steen's pedigree. In the liner notes Steen provides useful information on the origins of the various grooves, so you can learn something while tapping your toes in 10/4. (EF)

Bass Player Magazine
September 2003



LARRY STEEN WORLD
JAZZ ENSEMBLE

View From Afar [LMS Records,
LarrySteen.iuma.com]

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Larry Steen performed with the St. Helena High School Jazz choir, under the direction of Craig Bond, seen here in 1982.



8th annual jazz event brings world rhythms to Sullivan Vineyards

St. Helena High graduate Larry Steen blends cultures to create a unique sound

Sullivan Vineyards will present its 8th annual "Jazz in the Vineyards," featuring the Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble, in a concert on Sunday, Aug. 17, from 5-8 p.m., at the winery in Rutherford.

Composer and bassist Larry Steen's "world jazz" blends rhythms and musical textures from a variety of world cultures, including Brazilian, Caribbean, West African and Near Eastern. He has been referred to as "a giant of the not too distant future," by the esteemed late jazz critic, Leonard Feather.

A former St. Helena resident with family living all over the Napa Valley (and now Los Angeles-based, Steen has just released his second CD, "View From Afar," on his LMS Records label (distributed by Puretone), which is already garnering good reviews, such as this one from Jazzyreview.com: "Each track represents a trip, and the whole album represents an entire journey... Steen, who plays with taste and a stylistic breadth that is not easy to find. Steen has [a] strong conception that allows an album of such diverse influences to come together as a unified whole... Highly recommended."

Steen said, "Craig Bond [Vocal Music Director of St. Helena High School] was a major influence on me. He encouraged my creativity and skill development more than any teacher I've had." A graduate of St. Helena High School Steen has fond memories of playing his first gig at the Calis Napa Fair when he was 13.

The Sullivan "Jazz in the Vineyards" concert takes place on the winery lawn adjacent to

the vineyards, pond and rose garden, where guests can enjoy a picnic and glass of wine while listening to the music. Tickets are \$30 per person and can be purchased in advance by calling Sullivan Vineyards toll-free at 1-877-886-8238. Sullivan Family Wine Club members receive a 30 percent discount. Children under the age of 12 are free. Sullivan Vineyards is located at 1090 Gallatin Road, just off Highway 29, in Rutherford. Concertgoers are welcome to

“Craig Bond (Vocal Music Director of St. Helena High School) was a major influence on me. He encouraged my creativity and skill development more than any teacher I’ve had.”
Larry Steen

bring a picnic and enjoy Sullivan wines, which will be for sale. Admission will begin at 4:00 p.m., no earlier than one hour before the show. Additional information about Sullivan Vineyards can be found at <http://www.sullivanvines.com>. For information about Larry Steen visit LarrySteen.lms.com

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BASSIST covered

Bassist Larry Steen performs with the Robert Williams Trio on Sunday in San Pedro. Eighth Street was blocked off between Weymouth and Averill avenues for the jazz festival, which also included a classic car show and food booths.

KIM HAGGERTY ZYLJUS/
DAILY BREEZE





4

**Sunday,
April 21
11:00 a.m.-
4:00 p.m.**

My America Festival!

See page 6
for information
on the
My America
symposium

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Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble

11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

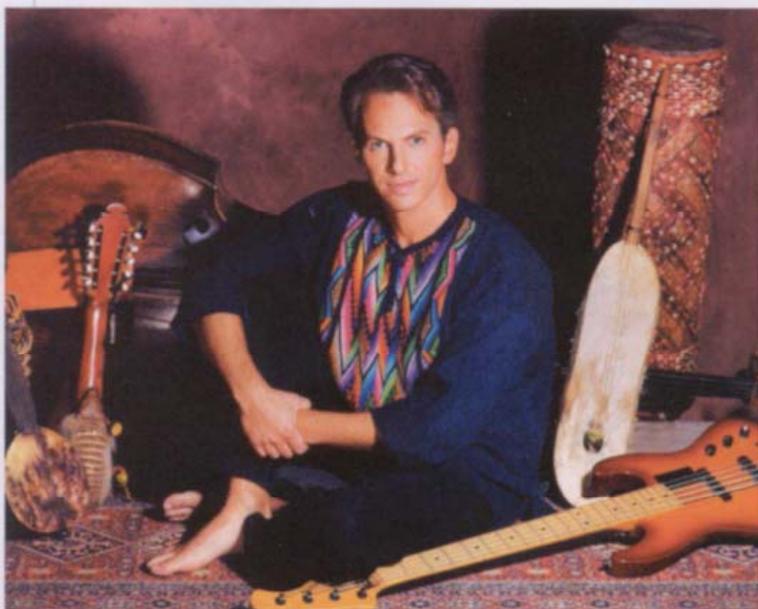
Declared as "a giant of the not-too-distant future" by the late Leonard Feather, composer/bassist Larry Steen leads his world jazz ensemble in an exuberant program that incorporates authentic Near Eastern, Balkan, West African, Celtic, Caribbean, and Brazilian influences fused with jazz, classical, and funk/R&B.

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CD Reviews: JAZZ AND BEYOND: JOHN STEVENSON'S 25-DISC REVIEW

Friday, June 27, 2003

Larry Steen World Ensemble: View from Afar (LMS)

Steen is possessed of an enviable facility on bass. He also understands how to mix'n'match several styles of music to produce desirable results. Grooves and deft arranging moves abound. On "Whelan's Jig", he juxtaposes a typical Irish jig with a Cameroonian Bikutsi drum pattern, and on "Shoshanat Ha Erev", he features the Armenian Duduk alongside a well-known Hebrew song. Ernie Watts, Russell Ferrante and Robben Ford also lend a hand to the global vibe.



The Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble: *A VIEW FROM AFAR*

This dynamic ensemble performs 10 original compositions structured from world music rhythms and the chordal harmony prevalent in jazz and classical music. Exotic instruments such as the oud, bouzouki, duduk, kawala, cavaghino, Uilleann pipes and a multitude of percussion instruments co-exist with traditional jazz instruments – saxophone, bass, drums – and challenge the musical skills and talents of such well-known artists as Ernie Watts, Robben Ford, Russell Ferrante and the mastermind himself, Larry Steen. Their masterful control of the sounds and the techniques of these exotic instruments are utterly unlike those heard on Steen's debut. The ensemble pulls the receptive listener in to share their musical journeys with skill and pleasurable nuances. Among the most entertaining songs Larry Steen offers his listeners are "Whelan's Jig" which fuses a tradition Irish jig with an authentic Cameroonian bikutsi groove. Another great song is "Drum 'n Barong" which is a *mélange* combining the Barong Dance, (one of the most pervasive of the Balinese gamelan orchestra repertoire), with textures of the Drum 'n Bass (dance club) genre. This song is very "fresh" and should connect with the underground warriors that party until the wee hours of the morning! Larry Steen and Robben Ford offer two highly sensitive solos on "Shoshanat Ha' Erev" and connect with your heartstrings. The inspired lyrical emanations from Pedro Eustache's duduk add another dimension of beautiful tone to this song. Ernie Watts plays an amazing soprano saxophone on the imaginative melody line and displays his already expansive musical horizons on the two-part "Away In The Sycamores." "Second Wind," "View From Afar" rounds out this varied program and verifies that Larry Steen's World Jazz Ensemble has exceeded the challenge set by the music on his debut release. In a sense, every song on this CD is well written, performed to perfection and causes *VIEW FROM AFAR* to rank right up there with some of the best world jazz on the scene today.

View from Afar

Artist [Larry Steen](#)

Album Title View from Afar

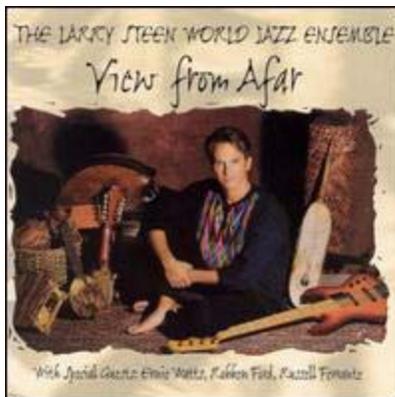
Date of Release 2003

AMG Rating ★★★★★

Genre [Jazz](#)

Library View [Click here](#) to see this album in MARC format

AMG REVIEW



Larry Steen has long been a student of music from other cultures. The electric bassist enjoys mixing in rhythms and melodies from other lands with fusion-oriented jazz. His nine originals on this CD (plus the traditional "Whelan's Jig") include aspects of music from Turkey, Ireland, Cameroon, Brazil, Israel, Bulgaria, Greece, Armenia, Trinidad, Poland, and Venezuela. There are also plenty of jazz solos and harmonies heard throughout Steen's fascinating set. Steen utilizes very flexible and skilled

musicians in his group, plus such guests as [Ernie Watts](#) on reeds, keyboardist [Tamir Hendleman](#), clarinetist [Leo Chelyapov](#), and guitarist [Robben Ford](#). The high musicianship and wide range of instrumental colors, exotic rhythms, and time signatures make this a highly recommended recording for listeners with open minds toward world music and fusion. — **Scott Yanow**

toledoblade.com®

Article published July 13, 2003

CD reviews:

VIEW FROM AFAR Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble (LMS)

The sounds, melodies, and rhythms on "View From Afar" may be unfamiliar to most jazz aficionados, being culled from music more common to countries of the Middle East, Balkans, and Africa. But Larry Steen and his crew find themes with which to improvise and express American jazz genres such as soul, blues, and funk with instruments like the oud (fretless lute), dumbek (drum), and duduk (a double reed wind instrument). The music is exhilarating, and the melodies can be haunting.

- LARRY ROBERTS

MIDWEST RECORD RECAP

The voice of the entertainment retailer and broadcaster

Volume 26/Number 15 (a)

June 7, 2003

LARRY STEEN WORLD JAZZ ENSEMBLE/View From Afar:

It's got guest like Ernie Watts, Robben Ford and Russ Ferrante, but don't totally think fusion jazz, think more like fusion cooking, and just as tasty as the results when they are properly done. This young lion bassist fully knows how to deliver the goods and this date is the kind of thing that adult listeners will get all the way. Using fusion jazz as its base, it adds world seasonings and ear opening accents for a full on effect that's hard to beat or ignore. A must so you can say you dug him when.

1002 (LMS)

Wine country alumnus thrills Copia crowd with musical styles from around the world

By L. PIERCE CARSON

Register Staff Writer

When truly talented musicians band together, the blend of harmonies and rhythms produced more often than not begets bliss.

Such was the case last Monday evening when Hollywood bassist/composer Larry Steen brought his delightful World Jazz Ensemble to Copia. Approximately 175 music lovers reveled in Steen and company's fusion of classic jazz and musical styles and textures from various regions of the world — and, I'm confident, went home happy.

Raised and educated in the Napa Valley, Steen is earning a comfortable living in the Los Angeles area as studio musician and teacher, and performs in all manner of ensembles, from symphony orchestra to night club band. But it's not hard to tell that it's world jazz that he enjoys most.

In bringing together the harmonies and textures from many world cultures, Steen fervently believes he can help promote

world peace and understanding. His music speaks volumes.

This 30-something bassman appreciates the folk songs and rhythms of cultures as diverse as Turkey and the Caribbean islands, Ireland and West Africa. Therefore, his musical palette incorporates oodles of unusual percussion instruments, folk-sounding themes and odd rhythmic patterns. Steen plays with time signatures in much the same way Dave Brubeck did in his world travels a generation ago.

The material offered is contemporary, yet, often, an underlying theme can be as respected as an Israeli love song, as dizzying as a whirling dervish.

Those themes and more were played out in first-class fashion the other evening, in a two-hour concert that, frankly, flew by.

From a playful twist on an Irish jig that kicked off the program to a rousing rendition of Charlie



Register Review

Parker's "Barbados," the play list provided something for everyone.

The energetic, gorgeous flute of Katisse Buckingham was heard

throughout, none any better than a rousing solo on the Tin Pan Alley classic, "Miserlou," a haunting melody from an unknown Hollywood composer that traces its roots to age-old Hasidic music.

Chris Wabich's yeoman drumming efforts displayed a distinct knowledge of the music's origins, as did the multi-layered percussion sounds provided by hard working Brad Dutz.

The splendid piano of Quinn Johnson proved incisive, whether breezing through a flute-alicious toetapper, "Second Wind," or digging deep into the folk rituals of Turkey on "Dervishland" or "Karshlama Blues," a couple of exceptional tunes from the ensemble's most recent compact disc, "View From Afar." Johnson had fun, too, with the "salsa with a

twist" runs demanded by "Seven Come Five," also known as "How Come I Can't Dance To This?"

You can tell Steen's listened to Prague-born Miroslav Vitous. But he's no imitator. A real innovator, this young musician is a classy pro. He's done what few contemporaries have managed to do — turning the electric bass, an integral part of the rhythm section, into a lead, or solo, instrument. He's producing compelling music, material you'd like to hear again and again.

The title track of the new CD is a prime example. It's a zesty stew that bubbles right out of the pot, tempting listeners with tasty melody and rhythm, prompting us to bang our utensils on the table, clamoring for "More!"

I believe it's appropriate to sum up the efforts of Larry Steen and the World Jazz Ensemble in a single word — brilliant.

If you missed the concert, you can get an ample taste of the world of Steen and friends by picking up one or both of their CDs.

The Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble

View from Afar - LMS Records



Bassist Larry Steen tackles two hemispheres' worth of music with this disc of traditional Asian and African harmonies weaved into a Western format. He has done his homework, and learned the intricacies and subtle differences of harmonic and rhythmic conventions.

Many world musicians join Steen in the ten tracks that harken old world artistry within a refined recording environment. They deliver authenticity of performance that allows advanced explorations of the source music; Western curiosity and analysis applied to elements of isolated, non-Western musical notions.

In light of the forms of foreign music, the often transparent - in the ears of the familiar - forms and restrictions of Western styles become clearer. For instance, "Karshlama Blues" reveals the repetitive structure of the Blues as it extends the style's components into a Middle Eastern scale and rhythm.

Perhaps more than the eclecticism of world music, *View From Afar* uncovers the idiosyncrasy of Western music. - Nick Burns

January 2002

L.A. JAZZ SCENE

Jazz Gumbo

Contemporary, Fusion, And World Beat Happenings

by Chris J. Walker

It's kind of surprising that there hasn't been more of this around, fusion with ethnic music or rather world beat-fusion. Bassist Larry Steen has come up with an interesting and viable bridge between the two genres that's not overdone from either aspect. At Catalina's he had a CD release party showcasing compositions from *Veiw from Afar*, his group **The Larry Steen World Ensembles'** latest release. The word was out and the turnout was impressive with many of the bassist's friends and fellow musicians in attendance. And with a band including drummer Chris Wabich, guitarist Jimmy Mahlis, percussionist Brad Dutz, keyboardist Quinn Johnson, and Katisse Buckingham, he performed masterfully. Foremost for the bandleader, besides sounding great was authenticity and acknowledgment of the various musical ethnicities utilized. He would always make a point of describing the basis of his selections. "Whelan's Jig," a combination of Irish jig and Cameroonian bikutsi was one of many like that and was a kicking jam. It was grounded by a driving rhythm featuring Steen playing a spacy interlude with Mahlis' soaring guitar work resembling Carlos Santana. Displaying a lighter, somewhat folk-like side, the ensemble played "Shoshanat Ha' Erev (Rose of the Evening), a thematic piece taken from a Hebrew song. Buckingham gracefully adorned it with his soprano saxophone, playing along with Steen's melodic bass solo.

January 2002

L.A. JAZZ SCENE

Jazz Around Town

by Scott Yanow

Electric bassist Larry Steen's World Jazz Ensemble had a record release party at Catalina's, celebrating his new CD *View From Afar*. Steen's group (consisting of Katisse Buckingham on flute and saxophones, Jimmy Mahlis on guitar and bouzouki, pianist Quinn Johnson, drummer Chris Wabich and percussionist Brad Dutz) lived up to its name, mixing together elements of music from several Mid-Eastern countries (most notably Turkey) with American fusion. "Wehlan's Jig" is a traditional Irish jig but with West African rhythms and jazz harmonies, "Second Wind" is Brazilian funk and "Karshlama Blues" is a 9/4 Turkish piece with rockish guitar and some tenor playing reminiscent of Michael Brecker. Also heard during the set was "Rose Of The Evening" (inspired by an Israeli tune and featuring some pretty soprano-sax) and the 10/4 Turkish-oriented "Dervishland." Overall the music was quite tricky (although expertly played by the well-rehearsed band), unusual and consistently intriguing.



BAND ON THE WEB

Larry Steen

With his debut album, *First Move* (LMS, 1997), Los Angeles-based composer and bassist Larry Steen (<http://LarrySteen.iuma.com>) has catapulted himself into the limelight as one of the most promising jazz artists to come along in years. Recognized by the late jazz critic Leonard Feather as "a giant of the not-too-distant future," Steen has generated an enthusiastic response from audiences as far away as Brazil and Hong Kong. The Internet has played a significant role in developing his following.

Steen first established himself in the Los Angeles music scene as a capable electric and acoustic bassist. A winner of the International Society of Bass Players' jazz competition, Steen studied at the University of Miami, the Berklee College of Music, and the California Institute of the Arts. He has also worked with numerous artists such as Melissa Manchester, Mel Torme, Stevie Wonder, and Louis Bellson.

On *First Move*, Steen weaves a fascinating sonic tapestry by combining West African, Brazilian, Caribbean, and Middle Eastern rhythms and grooves with intricate harmonic progressions, creating what he refers to as "world jazz." Though structurally complex, Steen's unique music contains memorable phrases that grab the listener like the hook of a popular song. "Though the harmony is intricate at times," says Steen, "the music is still very melodic."

First Move consists of 11 tracks, 9 of them composed, arranged, and produced by Steen. Well-known jazz artists Dave Weckl, Ernie Watts, Bill Cunliffe, and Jeff Beal contributed to the album.

Like many other artists seeking to broaden their exposure and sell their music outside the traditional distribution channels, Steen has turned his efforts toward the Internet. He has a presence on a variety of Web sites, including the Internet Underground Music Archive (www.iuma.com), Riffage.com (www.riffage.com), and MP3.com (www.mp3.com).

"People from all over the world have contacted me to express interest in my music," says Steen, who won ASCAP's Special Award four years in a row. "I anticipate that sales will increase dramatically in the near future as more people get online and feel secure about making credit-card transactions." Although the fiscal rewards for Steen's efforts are still in the offing, the steady exposure provided by the Internet is proving invaluable for the bassist's career. ●

Music Means the World to Larry Steen

Clearly a product of his environment, jazz bassist Larry Steen (B.M. '88) was raised in a family of musicians who instilled in him a strong love for music. As great appreciators and supporters of the arts, Steen's parents exposed him to a rich variety of sounds by frequently taking him to cultural music events and on trips around the world.

His debut CD, aptly titled *First Move*, is a mix of creative, world fusion music that blends funk and classical influences with rhythms of Brazil, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, and West Africa. Steen says his work draws upon his life experiences, attributing his intense passion and skill to his unique upbringing and education.

After attending the Berklee College of Music for two years, Steen joined the University of Miami's Department of Studio Music and Jazz, where he graduated *magna cum laude* in 1988. Though he had been writing songs since he was 14 years old, he claims his ability to compose was greatly enhanced while at the University.

"UM absolutely helped prepare me for

where I am today. Its very disciplined learning environment gave me all the necessary tools for being a well-rounded musician," says Steen. "I especially appreciated and benefited from the one-on-one attention at UM. While some music schools can feel like factories where you can get lost in the crowd, University of

Miami faculty were always very helpful and accessible."

He claims that soaking up the many different cultures in Miami also contributed to his affinity for world music, a melding which jazz is naturally progressing toward.

Steen's next venture will be another world jazz CD through which he hopes to showcase his band, the Larry Steen World Jazz Ensemble. But being rich and famous are not his ultimate goals.

"Music and the arts are crucial for bringing people together," says Steen, who lives in Los Angeles. "My aim is to enhance the interconnection and spirituality of humanity via the music experience. If I can't do that, I'd just like to just play artistic music that uplifts people in some way."



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LARRY STEEN: FIRST MOVE



LABEL: *LMS Records, 1351 Seward St., Los Angeles, CA 90028. 213-462-4874; Email: LMSteen@aol.com; Web page: <http://www.iuma.com/IUMA/Bands/Steen, Larry/>*

PERSONNEL: *Larry Steen, acoustic and*

electric basses, keyboards; with Jeff Beal, Ernie Watts, Doug Webb, Bill Cunliffe, Dave Weckl, and others

REVIEW BY JOHN BARRETT, JR.

You think "smooth," but it's not how they play. Over the gentle lines come a swarm of things: bold saxes, Latin beats, and an ever-present bass. This is Larry Steen, and he bows, floats or pounds as the mood requires. It's all unassuming; rarely does Larry step forward, but he is always there, with strong tunes and a confident tone. It leaps out the gate with muscular tracks. "Matu" has a soft guitar, but nery piano (Bill Cunliffe). It keeps edging toward smooth, and Cunliffe keeps bringing it back. His solo is big and lush, and Brian Monroni has delicate wisps on his turn. It ends prematurely but it's nice. The rhythm comes hard on "Seven Come Five," sharp bongos and steady bass. Jeff Beal starts with cool flugelhorn, taking little phrases higher and hotter. It has a fast pace, and how it

moves! "Torino" has Larry's first solo, a seamless wall where the notes shift and the mood glows. Cunliffe is sweet, and you briefly hear Ernie Watts on a high soprano. "Salif Meets Ralph" goes from exotica to sleek. "First Move" takes the same road. And forget smooth on "Break the Ice:" hard beats, funk from Larry, and serious strut from Webb - this is late-night R&B. Wait for the dubs at the end - a wall of horns that in time wait alone. Harsh, unexpected, and wonderful - I wish there was more.

Good as this is, parts are better than the whole. While he puts many eggs in the "smooth" basket, it's not really his strength. The Latin tunes burst with a fervor, in the lines and the way they're played. So he's at a crossroads. A good player and good composer, he could go one of many directions. As to where, we will have to wait - he has only made his first move.

THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST

Pick up any recent contemporary-jazz album and, more likely than not, there will be at least one tune with an international flavor — perhaps a Latin rhythm or tribal percussion.

For bassist Larry Steen, however, world music is more than just a passing interest or a strategic move; it's been deeply ingrained since his childhood in what he calls "a multicultural environment." Steen's parents were travel enthusiasts with a profound appreciation for other cultures. So the California-born Steen and his two sisters were inspired early on by the music, art, and dance they encountered while traveling through Asia, Mexico, the Greek Islands, Turkey, and Peru, among other places. The family even hosted exchange students from India and Japan.

Not surprisingly, when Steen embarked on his musical career, he combined these influences with jazz polish he'd picked up at the best American music schools. And he kept an ear open for new sounds and rhythms. Between his studies at Berklee and University of Miami, Steen soaked up Caribbean influences while working on a cruise ship. "There was a steel band," he recalls. "The guys were from different parts of the Caribbean, like St. John and St. Kitt's. Right next door to me was the bass player of the band, and every morning as I was waking up, he would have his cassette player blasting all this soca music. So I hung out with him, and he introduced me to a lot of soca and calypso music."

Steen is far from alone among contemporary-jazzers in referring to music as "world jazz." What sets Steen apart is his first-hand understanding of many different idioms. Steen's challenge for his debut album, *First Move* (LMS), was to replicate the authentic grooves and harmonies he heard in his travels while maintaining a jazz flavor. For example, the pensive ballad "Quiet Dignity" is based on a Japanese minor scale, and on the spirited "Nigerian Dream," Steen says he was going for a "very specific juju feel."

He enlisted an accomplished lineup of players,



including saxophonist Ernie Watts, trumpeter Jeff Beal, pianist Otmario Ruiz, and drummer Dave Weckl. "With the lead instruments," Steen says, "it was more a matter of them playing the melodies I wrote and improvising, just being jazz players, really. But for the rhythm-section guys, I wrote some of the grooves out."

Steen's various influences and his bandmates' innovations led to some novel twists. On "Salif Meets Ralph," Steen imagines what would happen

if African pop star Salif Keita wrote a tune with Ralph Towner of Oregon; the track opens with Pygmy chanting sampled from an out-of-print album of African music. "Seven Come Five (*Por qué no puedo bailar a esta?*)" is a spirited salsa with a twist. Its subtitle humorously asks, "Why can I not dance to this?" — and the answer lies in its unusual time signature. "It sounds like typical salsa, but it's not," Steen explains. "It has a funny little difference about it, and that is the fact that it's in 7 instead of 4/4. It's like dropping an eighth note. Of course, people in the Middle East — Greek people, for instance — have no problems dancing in odd meters, but for some reason Westerners find that a little bit disconcerting."

Steen's musical explorations are still very much connected to his worldly relatives. Recently, his older sister, a bellydancer, introduced him to Middle Eastern music at a dance camp in northern California, where he spent a week this summer. Master musicians from all parts of the Middle East taught classes, and concerts and jam sessions were held in the evenings. "Each night was dedicated to a different part of the Middle East. One night would be Turkish night, one night would be Greek night. I'd go out by the campfire — I brought this little cordless battery-powered amplifier which I'd recharge every night — and I'd bring my fretless bass and I'd jam with these Turkish guys playing the oud or the saz or something." —Lucy Tauss

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OREGON

Larry Steen *First Move* (LMS Records)

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