

Reviews for *Almost There*, 2017

Guardian

★★★★

REVIEW BY JOHN FORDHAM, THE GUARDIAN, JANUARY 2017

Barry Green, the below-the-radar but formidably skilled London pianist, takes off on cutting-edge New York collaborations. His 2015 trio with American drummer Gerald Cleaver and saxophonist Chris Cheek proved that, and this New York-recorded set with bassist Drew Gress and drummer Tom Rainey is just as surefootedly inventive.

Half of the dozen tracks are Green's (who's an adroit composer of postbop cliffhangers as well as thoughtful song themes); the others are famous Broadway, pop and jazz tunes. Green's jagged, stop-start title track is a typical contemporary-jazz mix of avant-swing and a flinty Latin feel.

Bud Powell's standard Bouncing With Bud is a wonderful interpretation, with its famous tune long postponed, Gress delivering an awesome bass solo of sly flicks and graceful melodic curves, and Green's improvisation a balance of foxy restraint and impulsiveness. You'll Never Walk Alone is fragmented and reharmonised without sabotage, Lulu's Back In Town and Thelonious Monk's Work are vivacious rhythm-teasers of quite different kinds.

This fine trio start a week's UK tour from 31 January.

Financial Times review

★★★★

REVIEW BY MIKE HOBART, THE FINANCIAL TIMES, FEBRUARY 2017

This absorbing piano trio album grips from its opening scatter of discords to the funky-out that closes a reimagining of Monk's Work.

In between, British pianist Green delivers a wide-ranging set of originals and covers with clean lines and the sensitive support of an experience American rhythm section featuring Drew Gress and Tom Rainey on bass and drums.

The programme ranges from minimalism to rollicking swing, with Bouncing With Bud transformed from bop classic to personal statement and Never Walk Alone gaining substance as a ballad.

Jazz Journal review

★★★★

REVIEW BY BRIAN MORTON, JAZZ JOURNAL, 2017

The title's all wrong. Barry Green has arrived already. The writing' crisp, sharp and adventurous, and his playing has real authority. Notice that the recording was made nearly three yeas ago. He must be positively scary now.

I don't get to see him play much, but on the three occasions I have, the time zipped by. The album title makes sense in the context of the first track, which is one of those tunes that seems to go all over the place before settling to a groove that isn't quite as unambiguous as it initially sounds.

Rainey takes a lovely intro feature on Bouncing With Bud as if to remind us what exalted company the Englishman now enjoys. And Rainey is his usual magnificent self, a latter-day Paul Motian, even if they don't sound remotely alike; the connection is an innate musicality that goes beyond time, metre, even swing.

You'll Never Walk Alone (played almost solo) has emotional grandeur, even when sung by the Kop (is Green a Reds fan?), but rarely sounds as nuanced as it is here. It's a terrific for the bop line that precedes it. And Lulu is a devastatingly unexpected sequel.

Two more terrific surprises in the set. Paul Simon's Train In The Distance, from the underrated, pre-Graceland Hearts and Bones, is a killer, its "life could be better" theme tinged with distant blues; and the other Paul's Her Majesty, the nearly rejected, hidden out-track on Abbey Road, is a stroke of genius. Nice version of the Monk line, too, but it's Green's oblique, clever writing that makes this record. I thought I'd had a bellyful of piano trios this year already, but this ones isn't to be missed.

Jazzwize review

★★★★

REVIEW BY SELWYN HARRIS, JAZZWIZE, APRIL 2017

The pianist Barry Green has self-produced a handful of enterprising recordings for his Moletone label that are testament of a song melody-driven contemporary post-bop manifesto.

Among his recorded bands are Babelfish, a writing collaboration with E17 Collection vocalist Brigitte Beraha, a duo with veteran bass namesake Dave Green, through to a 2015 trio CD with the mesmerising drummer Gerald Cleaver and saxophonist Chris Cheek. From the same period he was in New York, Green recorded this even stronger piano trio CD with the inimitable drummer Tom Rainey (they met as sideman with saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock's band), and bassist Drew Gress, touring the CD early 2017 in the UK.

Made up of pop song covers, jazz standards and originals, his version of You'll Never Walk Alone cold melt the hearts of the most hardcore Manchester United FC supporters. Fats Waller's Lulu's Back In Town is a crunching post-bop toe-tapper and there are nicely handled salutes to piano heroes, Monk (Work) and Powell (Bouncing With Bud).

Green's originals tend to have a more abstract feel about them, though the modernist 'classical' influences never obscure Green's love of pure melody while his ballad I Could See The Smallest Things echoes the work of Brad Mehldau. A version of Paul Simon's Train In The Distance touches on the kind of singer-songwriter repertoire he recorded with singer-songwriter Emilia Mårtensson on the excellent And So It Goes CD on Babel, as does a stuttering Paul Bley-ish miniature of The Beatles' Her Majesty. Rainey is in his element on that one and with long-time partner Gress gives unobtrusive yet inventive support throughout.