

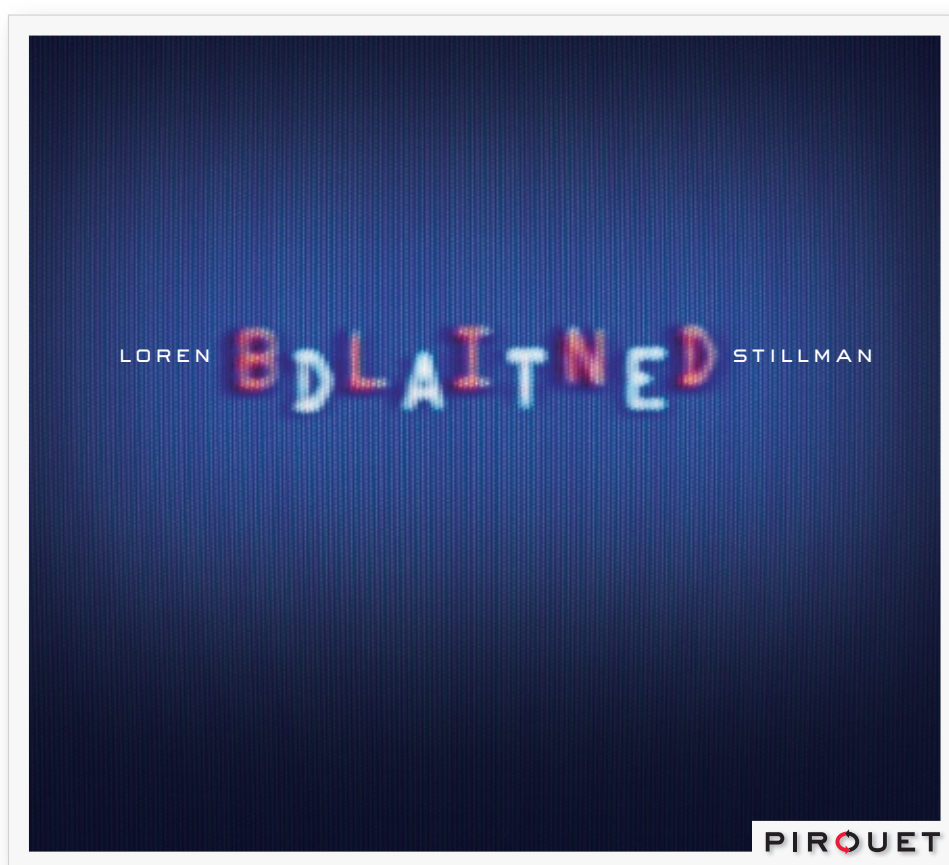


# LOREN STILLMAN

# BLIND DATE

Alto saxophonist Loren Stillman has an amazingly creative head on his shoulders. His music is refined, with a finely-shaded feeling for the unique. His world of sound is like paradise. A world in which you are seduced by style and uncommon beauty. A journey overflowing with unorthodox sounds and elemental surprises. Music for jazz connoisseurs.

*Der Altsaxophonist Loren Stillman ist ein frappierend kreativer Kopf. Seine Kompositionen sind leise Herausforderungen in einer eigenen, spannenden Sprache. Seine Klangwelt ein Paradies. Verführung mit Stil und konventionenfreier Schönheit findet darin statt. Eine CD voller unorthodoxer Klänge und Überraschungen im Detail – Musik für denkende Genießer.*



**LOREN STILLMAN** ALTO SAXOPHONE  
**GARY VERSACE** PIANO  
**DREW GRESS** BASS  
**JOEY BARON** DRUMS

MUNICH  
OCTOBER 2007

**PIROUET**  
P R E S S   R E L E A S E

## **LOREN STILLMAN · BLIND DATE**

**LOREN STILLMAN:** ALTO SAXOPHONE

**GARY VERSACE:** PIANO

**DREW GRESS:** BASS

**JOEY BARON:** DRUMS

**CD RELEASE:** NOVEMBER 26TH

## **The Devil in Paradise**

**The alto saxophone as the serpent in an unorthodox sound paradise: young saxophonist Loren Stillman's first CD on Pirouet, with Gary Versace, Drew Gress, and Joey Baron**

Alto saxophonist Loren Stillman has an amazingly creative head on his shoulders: he makes music that is so absorbingly different. One of his many captivating pieces, "Blind Date", begins quietly, with an almost tentative gesture during which the saxophone joins the piano as they tenderly snuggle up to the phrases. The approach is full of risks, but there is a certain respect for the strangeness of the situation – just such a respect as would be wise to maintain on a "Blind Date". And within the mix this saxophone comes across with an astounding sophistication that is devoid of anything that is cloying or syrupy-sweet. It is a sound and approach that is anything but your everyday sort of stuff – and it is typical Stillman. His music is refined, with a finely-shaded feeling for the unique; from first note to last, Stillman's compositions venture down unexplored melodic paths - quiet provocations in a unique, exciting language. With exceptionally assured mobility, his fellow travellers pianist Gary Versace, Bassist Drew Gress, and drummer Joey Baron accompany the saxophonist on his way – a journey overflowing with unorthodox sounds and elemental surprises.

Stillman knows how to ensnare his listeners. He does it with expertise and subtlety, and his captives enjoy their imprisonment. A photo on Stillman's homepage shows a mouthpiece that appears, like the head of a snake, to be striking at an alto saxophone - the serpent in paradise – and so is Stillman's world of sound. A world in which you are seduced by style and uncommon beauty.

Stillman was born in 1980 in London, but he grew up in the USA in Croton-on-Hudson, New York, and currently lives in Brooklyn. His Uncle, saxophonist Mike Stillman, inspired him to pick up that instrument, and so at the age of seven Loren began to take lessons from him. Over the last years he has been acclaimed by such magazines as Down Beat as a "rising star", and has played with Charlie Haden, Dave Liebman, and John Abercrombie. He names Lee Konitz and Wayne Shorter as musical influences, but along with them he also counts Hungarian composer Bela Bartók and the master of many styles, Frank Zappa.

**NEXT PAGE**



This first-class team suits such a spirit as Stillman's. There is the much sought-after Gary Versace, who through his work with such musicians as John Scofield, Maria Schneider, and Matt Wilson has become known as an extremely versatile pianist. There is bassist Drew Gress, a master of the right time at the right place, the first choice in New York when you need a bassist, a musician with references from Ray Anderson to Ravi Coltrane and Dawn Upshaw. And then there is Joey Baron, the exuberant velvet-handed high-voltage drummer who has laid down the right accent for such disparate leaders as Bill Frisell, Stan Getz, and John partners Zorn. Versace, Gress, and Baron: the three musicians already possess an enormous potential for empathy and inherent substance, and in quartet with Loren Stillman they are a tight-knit team of electrifying intensity.

They capture a myriad of unexpected colours and shadings within an iridescently open idiom – and they do it with an elasticity and surety of style that shimmers in a kaleidoscope of moods and emotions. Most of the pieces are like still-action photos that suddenly come to life for a few fascinating minutes. Sometimes they are filled with a mysterious beauty, sometimes ardently serpentine, sometimes rhythmic with smoothly rounded edges, sometimes a fresh breeze that slips through your fingers, sometimes unwieldy, with a touch of the sinister. Then once again, play that is deep, substantial, with interwoven intervals and ideas that seem to always take unexpected twists and turns – no trite melodies or stock harmonies to be found here! For the most part, Stillman doesn't construct his compositions along a row of chord progressions; rather he continually creates new interlocking melodic elements: he is master of contemporary jazz counterpoint who follows his own persuasive rules.

One of Stillman's pieces is called "Don't Be Too Nice"; "too nice" is something that his music can never be accused of. This is jazz that refuses to be commonplace. Instead, it displays an exceptionally refined sense of unity. This is the music of a unique mind who understands that you don't need to compromise and accommodate in order to please. The devil in paradise. "What Will People Think?" is the title of another Stillman composition, and it almost seems unnecessary: – it is hardly a criteria for a music that rests so confidently within itself. And yet a fascinating proposition: Stillman writes and plays music for jazz connoisseurs who think for themselves, for listeners who appreciate a creative mind, and delight in eating the fruit of the tree of jazz knowledge; music for listeners who would be willing to be expelled from their old music-paradise in order to renew the search. In this case, it is a fall from one paradise into another.





MÜNCHEN  
IM OKTOBER 2007

**PIROUET**  
PRESSEMITTEILUNG

## **LOREN STILLMAN · BLIND DATE**

**LOREN STILLMAN:** ALTO SAXOPHONE

**GARY VERSACE:** PIANO

**DREW GRESS:** BASS

**JOEY BARON:** DRUMS

**CD-VERÖFFENTLICHUNG:** 22. NOVEMBER 2007

## **Der widerspenstige Veredler**

**Das Altsaxophon als Schlange in einem unorthodoxen Klangparadies: Die erste Pirouet-CD von Sax-Youngster Loren Stillman mit Gary Versace, Drew Gress und Joey Baron**

Der Altsaxophonist Loren Stillman ist ein frappierend kreativer Kopf. Er macht Musik, die sohaft anders ist. Ganz leise, sanft vorantastend beginnt eines der vielen aufregenden Stücke von ihm, „Blind Date“ – und dem Klavier gesellt sich ein Saxophon hinzu, das sich fein und zart in die Phrasen schmiegt. Das Annäherung wagt und doch Respekt vor Fremdheit wahrt – wie es eben bei einem „Blind Date“ ratsam ist. Und dieses Saxophon klingt dabei nie lieblich, sondern immer nur besonders raffiniert. Und unalltäglich. Und genau das ist typisch für Stillman. Das Raffinement, der Sinn fürs Eigene, immer fein Abgetönte, für eine Melodiosität abseits bekannter Pfade: All dies zieht sich vom Anfang bis zum Ende durch die Stücke dieses Musikers. Diese Stücke sind alles Eigenkompositionen Loren Stillmans. Alles leise Herausforderungen in einer eigenen, spannenden Sprache. Und die Mitstreiter, Pianist Gary Versace, Bassist Drew Gress und Schlagzeuger Joey Baron, gehen mit ungemein sicherer Beweglichkeit die Wege dieses Saxophonisten mit. Eine CD voller unorthodoxer Klänge und Überraschungen im Detail.

Stillman weiß, wie man Hörer und Betrachter fängt. Er macht das gut. Er macht es subtil. Und das Opfer hat Vergnügen. Auf einem Foto von Stillmans Homepage schnellst einem das Mundstück des Altsaxophons wie der Kopf einer Schlange entgegen. Schlangen gibt's zum Beispiel im Paradies. Und Stillmans Klangwelt ist eines. Verführung mit Stil und konventionenfreier Schönheit findet darin statt.

Stillman wurde 1980 in London geboren; er wuchs aber in den USA auf, in Croton-on-Hudson, New York, und lebt heute in Brooklyn. Sein Onkel, der Saxophonist Mike Stillman, inspirierte ihn, das Instrument zu spielen – mit ihm begann Loren Stillman als Siebenjähriger. Als Solist wurde er in den letzten Jahren etwa vom Down Beat Magazine als Rising Star gefeiert, er spielte mit Charlie Haden, Dave Liebman und John Abercrombie. Lee Konitz und Wayne Shorter nennt er als musikalische Einflüsse, aber auch den ungarischen Komponisten Béla Bartók und den Großmeister vieler Klassen Frank Zappa.

**NÄCHSTE SEITE**



Zu einem Geist wie Stillman passt dieses erstklassige Team. Da ist der vielgefragte Gary Versace, in Sachen hochprofiliertes Flexibilität geschult durch die Zusammenarbeit mit Musikern wie John Scofield, Maria Schneider und Matt Wilson. Da ist der Bassist Drew Gress, ein Punktgenauigkeits-Meister, erste Wahl in New York, ein Musiker mit Referenzen von Ray Anderson bis Ravi Coltrane und Dawn Upshaw. Und da ist der quirlige Samtpfoten-Hochspannungs-Schlagzeuger Joey Baron, der für so unterschiedliche Leader wie Bill Frisell, Stan Getz und John Zorn stets die richtigen Akzente fand. Versace, Gress und Baron: Diese drei musikalischen Partner besitzen schon jeweils für sich ein enormes Potenzial an Einfühlung und Eigen-Sinn. Und im Quartett mit Loren Stillman sind sie ein Gespann von knisternder Intensität.

Sie fesseln mit vielen unerwarteten Farben und Abtönungen. Mit Elastizität und Stilsicherheit in einem schillernd offenen Idiom voller Stimmungs-Schattierungen. Wie fotografische Moment-Aufnahmen, die sich dann plötzlich in Bewegung setzen und einige Minuten lang ein faszinierendes Eigenleben führen, sind die meisten Stücke. Sie sind mal rätselhaft schön, mal verschlungen quirlig, mal rhythmisch mit sanften Kanten, mal wie ein dahingewehter Hauch, den man nicht greifen kann, mal sperrig mit einem Touch von Unheimlichkeit, dann wieder ein hintersinniges Spiel mit ineinander verhakten Intervallen, die immer eine Idee anders weitergehen als erwartet. Gewöhnliche Melodik oder althergebrachte Harmonik sind in ihnen nicht zu finden. Und ohnehin konstruiert Stillman seine Stücke für gewöhnlich nicht an Akkordprogressionen entlang, sondern verschränkt melodische Elemente immer neu: ein Meister eines zeitgenössischen Jazz-Kontrapunkts nach eigenen, immer überzeugenden Gesetzen.

„Don't Be Too Nice“ heißt eines seiner Stücke: Und „nett“ ist Stillmans Musik sowieso nie. Dieser Jazz verweigert sich auf sanfte Art jeder Harmlosigkeit. Und er entfaltet dabei eine ungemein stilvolle Geschlossenheit. Die Musik eines eigenen Kopfes, der gerade dadurch zu gefallen weiß, dass er nicht gefällig ist. Veredelte Widerspenstigkeit. Die Frage, die Stillman in einem anderen Titel stellt, erübrigt sich fast: „What Will Other People Think?“ Das ist kaum ein Kriterium für eine Musik, die so souverän in sich ruht. Und doch ein spannender Anstoß: Stillman schreibt und spielt Musik für denkende Genießer – oder auch: für genießende Denker. Für Hörer, die kreative Köpfe mögen und gern vom Baum der Jazz-Erkenntnis essen. Die sich aus alten Musik-Paradiesen mal eben vertreiben lassen, um neue zu suchen. Sie dürften es in diesem Falle kaum bereuen.





AWARDS

**PIROUET**  
P R E S S   R E L E A S E

## LOREN STILMAN – BLIND DATE

★★★★★ **The Irish Times** – *November 23rd 2007*

★★★★★ **Jazz Man** (France) – *November 2007*

★★★★★ **Jazz'n'More** (Switzerland – *March 2008*

**Best of 2007** awarded by Tribuna da Imprensa (Rio de Janeiro, Brasil):

**Alto Sax:** No.3 – Loren Stillman



“At 27, alto saxophonist and composer Loren Stillman is unique. ... Stillman’s superb quartet, with Gary Versace (piano), Drew Gress (bass) and Joey Baron (drums), adds to the music sense of wholeness and surprise.” *Ray Comiskey – The Irish Times* →

“...What a wonderfully gifted reedman we’ve been blessed to hear in the persona of one Loren Stillman. ... To the point, Stillman is a genuine versatile & creative improviser!”  
*George W. Carroll – ejazznews.com* →

“Loren Stillman, an exceptionally gifted young alto saxophonist... He’s a watchful sort of improviser, rigorous about everything, including the unknown. *Nate Chinen – New York Times* →

“...He brings in a minimalist approach, letting the notes fall in random and float in the wide space he provides. He brings in contrast as well, with closely woven textures and a forward emphatic thrust. Both make for logical explorations and help shape a stimulating album...”  
*Jerry D’Souza – allaboutjazz.com* →

„... Weich changierende Farben, meditative Tönungen, spannende Wendungen, denen aufmerksam zu lauschen, zugleich genussvoll sich hinzugeben lohnt, gestalten eine Produktion von erlesener Qualität.“ *Tobias Böcker – Jazz Podium* →

„... „Blind Date“ ist bereits sein neuntes Werk und von einer unglaublich intensiv leuchtenden Kraft. ... „Blind Date“ klingt nicht nur vorzüglich (das zehnmünütige „Shape Shifter“ mit seiner sich aufschaukelnden Spannung ist ein Geniestreich), sondern steckt auch in einer sehr esthetischen Verpackung.“ *Rolf Thomas – Jazzthing* →

„... Jazz-Kontrapunkt für Zeitgenossen und eine rundum überzeugende Scheibe eines Musikers, für den nach diesem Eindruck eine große Karriere zu erwarten ist.“  
*Stefan Freissmann – Südkurier (Schweiz)* →





## **LOREN STILLMAN**

### **“Blind Date” (Pirouet)**

Loren Stillman, an exceptionally gifted young alto saxophonist, has not been shy about his music. “Blind Date,” on the German label Pirouet, is his seventh release in four years. Most of his previous efforts have conveyed the casual integrity of progress reports, not a bad thing for a jazz musician in his 20s. But Mr. Stillman has delved deeper here, creating a thematically unified yet multidimensional work.

He receives invaluable support from the pianist Gary Versace, the bassist Drew Gress and the drummer Joey Baron, a buoyant and broad-minded rhythm section. Throughout the album they expertly follow the contours of Mr. Stillman’s compositions, applying more or less pressure as the situation demands.

Mr. Stillman writes music that’s intricate but unforced and devoid of pretension. A few of his melodies attest to the influence of Paul Motian, with whom he has apprenticed; his harmonic logic can evoke Wayne Shorter, whose example he has absorbed. There’s also a hint of Tim Berne’s stuttering rhythmic cadence, in a tune called “Don’t Be Too Nice.” To Mr. Stillman’s credit, none of these invocations goes far enough to suggest a pastiche.

Just as important, he has a distinctive sound on his instrument — full but dry, with only the slightest intimation of vibrato — and he shows restraint and consideration in his solos. When a song opens up rhythmically, as happens often here, he sets an agenda without closing off alternative options. He’s a watchful sort of improviser, rigorous about everything, including the unknown.

**NATE CHINEN**

*The New York Times* – November 28, 2007





**CD Reviews:**

**Loren Stillman/Blind Date/PIT3024**

MUSIC!!!... When it's right, It's right! What a wonderfully gifted reedman we've been blessed to hear in the persona of one Loren Stillman. His enormous talents belie his youth. Loren plays with a consistency & a gentle touch that is often identified with the cool idiom. He backs up his delivery with solid harmonic and melodic inflection and a strong rhythmic drive. To the point, Stillman is a genuine versatile & creative improviser! I don't think I'm presumptuous when I say that Loren draws viable & gainful energy from the mainstream jazz tradition... Yet, that said, he maintains a personal sound & style as an improviser. Mucho kudos to you Loren!

**George W. Carroll**

**[ejazznews.com](http://ejazznews.com) – January 07, 2008**





**LOREN STILMAN**

**Blind Date**

★★★★

At 27, alto saxophonist and composer Loren Stillman is unique. His Music, cerebral yet warm and lyrical, is meticulously wrought: as writer and improviser, he can encompass unusual interval and rhythm leaps with flowing ease. Its constantly changing contours, epitomised in the aptly titled *Shape Shifter*, are impressive, as are the balance of structure and freedom of *Don't Be Too Nice*, the absence of superfluous gesture in *Blind Date*, the delightful interweaving of piano and alto of *Major*. Stillman's superb quartet, with Gary Versace (piano), Drew Gress (bass) and Joey Baron (drums), adds to the music sense of wholeness and surprise. And, for all his cool, considered understatement, he can summon up heat when required, unfazed by such strong personalities as Gress and Baron in the trio setting of *Theme for a New Regime*.

*Ray Comiskey*

*The Irish Times – November 23rd 2007*





## **Blind Date** **Loren Stillman | Pirouet Records (2007)**

*by Michael P. Gladstone*

Not having the advantage of hearing altoist Loren Stillman's earlier albums, *Blind Date* can only be compared to having seen him in concert some five years ago. Opening for the more straight-ahead Lew Tabackin Quintet and singer Roberta Gamborini, Stillman and his quartet showed no mercy and spent the entire set in full free jazz flight. Stillman had either misjudged this very mainstream audience or wanted to make the most of such an opportunity.

*Blind Date* begins promisingly, the title tune showcasing Stillman's balladry and coming across fully as a combination of Lee Konitz and a dry martini; the perfect start for someone who blew the house away—a negative connotation—with his avant-garde playing in the past.

Stillman reports that he studied with both Konitz and Dave Liebman, but his influences also include Béla Bartók and Frank Zappa. After bassist Drew Gress and pianist Gary Versace solo on the seven minute-plus "What Will People Think," the altoist approaches his playing with some edginess, in the general vicinity of Ornette Coleman's early-1960s Atlantic period.

Stillman's group is well-chosen to accompany him. Versace doesn't always provide the more standardized comping and cushioning, laying out during Stillman's solo on "Theme For A New Regime," while providing some dissonant flourishes on "Don't Be Too Nice" that are later matched by Gress and drummer Joey Baron. Gress and Baron are individualistic musicians and the drummer's experience with outside players helps.

"Theme for a New Regime" and "Don't Be Too Nice" find Stillman very carefully toeing a line between mainstream and avant-garde. It is almost as if his long phrases and swoops are making it clear that he is fully capable of taking it out, but is providing just a taste of it here. Appropriately, the closing tracks ("Major," "Legroom" and "Etude") offer something that this listener would want to hear more of, but that may well have to wait for another occasion.

**Track listing:** *Blind Date*; What Will Other People Think; Etude; Shape Shifter; Theme For A New Regime; Don't Be Too Nice; Major; Legroom; Etude - Reprise.

**Personnel:** Loren Stillman: alto saxophone; Gary Versace: piano; Drew Gress: bass; Joey Baron: drums.

**Style:** Modern Jazz/Free Improvisation

*AllAboutJazz.com – January 31, 2008*





## **Blind Date** **Loren Stillman | Pirouet Records (2007)**

*by Jerry D'Souza*

A blind date can be risky, cause apprehension and kindle a sense of adventure. Anticipating Loren Stillman's foray into his own Blind Date stirs all those feelings.

Stillman has been inspired by jazz as he has with classical music. His compositions reflect both streams, and his narratives are eloquent. He brings in a minimalist approach, letting the notes fall in random and float in the wide space he provides. He brings in contrast as well, with closely woven textures and a forward emphatic thrust. Both make for logical explorations and help shape a stimulating album.

Stillman's approach to "Blind Date" is interesting. He floats in and out of the melody marking its presence but never giving it a pronounced shape. It is left to Gary Versace (piano) to define the melody and let it swing lightly. The ethereal beauty of the composition having been manifested, Stillman lets the composition sing its final notes in a deeper groove.

Oblique references also fill "What Will Other People Think." Stillman's interjections and intense angular probing are countenanced by Drew Gress who opens the harmony to jazz on his expansive bass solo and by Versace, who once again adds swing and a well of ideas. Stillman gets a hard punch into the beat and turns the tune into a nice shade of bop. The approach makes for a fine balance.

"Shape Shifter" has a compact sense of jazz harmony. Gress and Versace set the tone with their interplay before Stillman comes in, delving with appealing flair into the melody, constantly sifting ideas and turning them into little gems. Drummer Joey Baron's take on time adds to the flavor as he primes it just a shade ahead of that evoked by Stillman.

Each of the musicians is pivotal to the evolution of the compositions. They come up spades both in their individual inventions and their collective paths.

**Track listing:** Blind Date; What Will Other People Think; Etude; Shape Shifter; Theme For A New Regime; Don't Be Too Nice; Major; Legroom; Etude - Reprise.

**Personnel:** Loren Stillman: alto saxophone; Gary Versace: piano; Drew Gress: bass; Joey Baron: drums.

**Style:** Modern Jazz/Free Improvisation

*AllAboutJazz.com – December 26, 2007*





## **Blind Date** **Loren Stillman | Pirouet Records (2007)**

*by Budd Kopman*

After what appears to be an interlude of SteepleChase releases ( Brothers' Breakfast & Trio Alto Volume One, released in 2006 and Trio Alto, Volume 2, 2007), saxophonist Loren Stillman returns to his earlier quartet format with the marvelous Blind Date.

The music on the current release connects directly to Stillman's first three (mature) recordings: How Sweet It Is (Nagel Heyer, 2003), Gin Bon (Fresh Sound New Talent, 2004) and It Could Be Anything (Fresh Sound New Talent, 2005).

While the SteepleChase recordings are recognizably Stillman, even when he plays standards, the music feels conservative from the point of view of chances wished for and taken. With Blind Date, however, all of the assurance, intellect and beauty that originally captivated and built his following, is back on display.

It is now time to stop noting his youth and to realize that such an original compositional voice and musical conception does not come along very often. His saxophone sound is immediately recognizable and is an intimate part of the total musical package that also includes a smooth, slow, watery vibrato.

Stillman's music is highly accessible in that its melodies, however surprising their turns, are extremely logical and have the feel of inevitability about them. The harmony supporting these melodies is soft-edged and floats as if pushed by the musical wind—Stillman cites guitarist John Abercrombie as a strong influence. Finally, his music is rhythmically supple with a pulse that is felt but not at all obvious and which also shifts as the band feels the moment.

Pianist Gary Versace has played and recorded with Stillman in the past, and takes to this music as if it were his own. Completely in control, Versace gets inside this extremely personal music, adding his own personality and color to Stillman's idiomatic compositions.

Stillman's music needs a bottom and a bass player who is comfortable with odd time signatures and phrase lengths, and who can also change rhythmic feels instantly. Drew Gress is a very melodic player who is able to perform the same kind of function that Scott Lee did on the earlier albums, the ability to play a separate line while tying the piano and drums together rhythmically. Drummer Joey Baron is a bit of a surprise choice in that he is normally thought of as more extroverted than is required here, as demonstrated on Abercrombie's Third Quartet (ECM, 2007). However, he proves to be as perceptive and adaptive as Jeff Hirshfield was on the earlier albums, providing subtlety, grace and drive in equal measure.

The music of Blind Date ranges from the mysterious and faintly dangerous to the overtly, but not obviously, forceful. Thoughtfully presented, with much space between tracks allowing contemplation, this music has the capacity to amaze and seduce the body and the mind. At once immediately comprehensible and yet very deep, Loren Stillman deserves our full attention.

**Track listing:** Blind Date; What Will Other People Think; Etude; Shape Shifter; Theme For A New Regime; Don't Be Too Nice; Major; Legroom; Etude - Reprise.

**Personnel:** Loren Stillman: alto saxophone; Gary Versace: piano; Drew Gress: bass; Joey Baron: drums.

**Style:** Modern Jazz/Free Improvisation

**AllAboutJazz.com – December 27, 2007**





## **Blind Date** **Loren Stillman | Pirouet Records (2007)**

*by Mark F. Turner*

For alto saxophone aficionados, Loren Stillman's *Blind Date* is an exquisite release. An intrepid artisan with virtuosity, a refined tone and evocative phrasing; it's hard to believe that the London-born musician is only in his twenties. But with a number of recordings as a leader he's showing that practice does indeed strive for perfection.

The recording is a progressive set of Stillman originals that are equally atmospheric and acutely performed with a band of like-minded players including the ubiquitous talents of bassist Drew Gress, pianist Gary Versace, and drummer Joey Baron. The music lays its markers in avant-garde and modern jazz composition, suggesting a more progressive stance than heard on Stillman's previous *Steeplechase* recordings— *Trio Alto Volume 1* (2006) and *Trio Alto Volume 2* (2007).

There's a distinct persona within the nine compositions that embodies sophisticated imprints of chamber music with deft improvisation on "Blind Date" and "Etude." On "What Will Other People Think" there's a Monk-ish staggered cadence that swells and shrinks, whereas "Shape Shifter" develops slowly, like a blossoming flower, starting with a commanding solo by Gress, then moving into an elegant yet progressive piece as Stillman's lithe and warm voice takes the lead. It also includes some heady interaction between Gress, Versace, and Baron—the perfect balance of composition and musicianship.

The odd-metered groove of "Theme For A New Regime" is a feat, not for the faint-of-heart, with its propulsive backbeat and Stillman's voice turning on the flames. The implied swing of "Major" is catching, as the musicians collaborate and eagerly exchange spontaneous ideas, and features a definitive closing solo from Baron.

Loren's writing is increasingly challenging and thought-provoking, and the fittingly named "Don't be Too Nice" is a good case in point. What begins as a peaceful motif morphs into a twisting mélange of notes and solos. Here, Versace's brilliant solo is imaginative and whimsical. Another highlight is "Legroom," where the instruments engage in a complicated dance, moving in and out of the rousing melody.

The alto saxophone still thrives in this tenor-sax dominated arena. The role call is still going with respected names of time-weathered leaders like Charlie Parker, Lee Konitz and Greg Osby, and emerging new players—Miquel Zenon, Logan Richardson and certainly Loren Stillman—bringing up the rear.

**Track listing:** Blind Date; What Will Other People Think; Etude; Shape Shifter; Theme For A New Regime; Don't Be Too Nice; Major; Legroom; Etude - Reprise.

**Personnel:** Loren Stillman: alto saxophone; Gary Versace: piano; Drew Gress: bass; Joey Baron: drums.

**Style:** Modern Jazz/Free Improvisation

*AllAboutJazz.com – December 23, 2007*



**Featured Artist: LOREN STILMAN**

**CD Title: *Blind Date***

**Year: 2007**

**Record Label: Pirouet**

**Style: Straight-Ahead / Classic**

**Musicians: Loren Stillman (alto saxophone), Gary Versace (piano), Drew Gress (bass), Joey Baron (drums)**

**Review:**

Born in London, England, but raised in Croton-on-Hudson New York, alto saxophonist Loren Stillman's teachers include Dave Liebman, Ted Nash, and Dick Oatts. He has received scholarships to study at both The Manhattan School of Music and New York University and was a semi-finalist for the Thelonious Monk Saxophone Competition in 2005. He has worked with the Charlie Haden Liberation Music Orchestra, The Village Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, and John Abercrombie, among others. *Blind Date* is his eighth CD as a leader.

Using a light and feathery touch, Stillman turns his newest CD into a swirl of colors that wash over each other in various shades of hue. The way he mixes his distinctive sound with his unique compositional feel results in a collection of original jazz that is neither in the traditional straight-ahead mold nor completely out of it, either.

For example, "What Will Other People Think" has an angular melody that cries out for a solo section in the free-jazz mold. Instead, what we get is a mix of free jazz elements sprinkled with tradition. Stillman's solo stutters and quick steps in perfect lockstep with the accompanied duet by pianist Gary Versace. Together they use the best of free-jazz shared-association form and combine it with a harmonic underpinning that is used as a guide, not a rule. The result is an elegant artistic statement by two musicians who have obvious love for each other's playing.

Bassist Drew Gress shows deft and intelligent musicianship during his introduction to "Shape Shifter." His technique is not on display for its effect, but for the melodic craftsmanship having such abilities allow him. His tone radiates full-bodied warmth while his lines sweetly tell their own story. Stillman's following melodic statement is open enough for Gress to make poignant contrapuntal statements of his own. Drummer Joey Baron, certainly a monster in his own right, shows why he's in constant demand with his impressionistic cymbal accompaniment. He doesn't just add color, but instead infuses his work with a melodic portent all its own.

There is little fault to find in this disc. A quartet of musicians making highly-skilled fully-integrated-on-every-level music is rare and worth checking out; that they make it so successfully in-the-cracks between free and traditional styles is even more reason to celebrate.

Tracks: *Blind Date*, What Will Other People Think, Etude, Shape Shifter, Theme For A New Regime, Don't Be Too Nice, Major, Legroom and Etude (Reprise)

**Reviewed by:** Thomas R. Erdmann, [jazzreview.com](http://jazzreview.com)





**LOREN STILMAN**

**Blind Date – all music guide review**

When it comes to jazz, some dogmatic individuals suffer from an either/or mentality. They might assume that if you are playing bop at all, you are a rigid purist who would never dreaming of touching an electric bass – or, dogmatists might assume that if you have any connection to the avant-garde, you must be playing the most extreme free jazz. But in reality, things aren't nearly so black and white. There are shades of gray in jazz, and Loren Stillman points to some of them on *Blind Date*. This 2006 recording, which finds the alto saxophonist offering original material exclusively, is neither an example of retro-boppers playing Charlie Parker standards nor an exercise in atonal chaos; Stillman, rather, keeps his options open and provides an album that is mildly avant-garde but not radically avant-garde. One of the strongest influences on Stillman's alto playing is Lee Konitz, but *Blind Date* never sounds like cool jazz – not at all. Instead, Stillman shows some appreciation of Konitz in his tone but delivers inside/outside material that has one foot in post-bop and the other in jazz's avant-garde. But even on *Blind Date*'s most outside solos, Stillman is never heavy-handed or confrontational; when Stillman goes outside, his solos bring to mind the reflective, pensive AACM school of avant-garde playing rather than the ferocious, dense, scorching atonality one expects from a free jazz firebrand like Charles Gayle. This noteworthy release demonstrates that there is no reason why a saxophonist who has been influenced by Konitz cannot learn a few things from Anthony Braxton and Roscoe Mitchell as well.

*Alex Henderson*  
*artistsdirect.com*





## **LOREN STILMAN**

### **Blind Date**

Spinnwebfeine Raffinesse prägt die siebte CD des ursprünglich aus London stammenden New Yorker Altsaxophonisten Loren Stillman, seine erste für das sich mehr und mehr zum Geheimtip der absoluten ästhetischen Oberklasse entwickelnde Münchener Labels Pirouet. Das Quartett mit Gary Versace, p, Drew Gress, b, und Joey Baron, dr, überzeugt durch flexible Elastizität und intensiv zuhörendes Interplay. Die Stücke sind komplex, bergen jede Menge duftig subtiler Überraschungen und fein gewiegter Herausforderungen, bleiben bei allem Detailreichtum stets frappierend nachvollziehbar und lassen der Phantasie viel Raum zum Atmen. Stillman nennt als Bezugspunkte Wayne Shorter und Lee Konitz, daneben auch Béla Bartok und Frank Zappa, was durchaus nicht gegen einen sehr kohärenten eigenen Stil spricht. Weich changierende Farben, meditative Tönungen, spannende Wendungen, denen aufmerksam zu lauschen, zugleich genussvoll sich hinzugeben lohnt, gestalten eine Produktion von erlesener Qualität.

*Tobias Böcker*

*Jazzpodium (Deutschland) – Februar 2008*





## **LOREN STILMAN**

### **Der Wille zum Stil**

„Ich glaube, es war ein Fehler“ lacht Loren Stillman auf die Frage, was ihn zum Jazz getrieben habe. „Wenn mir jemand vorher gesagt hätte, mit welchen finanziellen Schwierigkeiten man zu tun hat, hätte ich es mir vielleicht noch mal überlegt.“ Aber da die Familie mit einem Onkel, der Amateursaxofonist war, ein „role model“ bot und Jazzsaxofonisten den kleinen Loren einfach ansprachen, war der Weg geebnet. Der 27 jährige Altsaxofonist kann jedenfalls durchaus als Wunderkind durchgehen, denn bereits im zarten Alter von 15 Jahren hat der Amerikaner seine erste Platte eingespielt. „Blind Date“ (Pirouet/H'art) ist bereits sein neuntes Werk und von einer unglaublich intensiv leuchtenden Kraft.

Mit dem Pianisten Gary Versace, dem Bassisten Drew Gress und Joey Baron am Schlagzeug hat Stillman allerdings auch versierte und kongeniale Partner. „Mit Gary und Drew arbeite ich schon sieben oder acht Jahre zusammen“, erzählt Loren Stillman, „und Joey Baron habe ich in Kanada bei einem JazzWorkshop kennen gelernt. Er ist so dynamisch, und man muss ihm nie sagen, was er spielen soll.“ Die neun Stücke auf „Blind Date“ stammen alle aus Stillmans Feder, und man muss es so deutlich sagen: Hier ist ein großes Talent viel zu lange übersehen worden. Stilsicherheit und Eigensinn ergeben eine verführerische Mischung, die vielleicht einfach ein bisschen zu unspektakulär ist, um Aufmerksamkeit zu erregen. Doch zumindest die europäische Medienlandschaft ist aufgewacht. So wurde jüngst in der Neuen Zürcher Zeitung beklagt, dass auf europäischen Festivals immer nur amerikanische Altstars wie Oliver Lake zu bewundern seien und nicht stattdessen einmal jüngere Musiker wie, genau, Loren Stillman. Vielleicht wirkt der Vertrag mit dem deutschen Pirouet-Label da ja Wunder – „Blind Date“ klingt nicht nur vorzüglich (das zehnminütige „Shape Shifter“ mit seiner sich aufschaukelnden Spannung ist ein Geniestreich), sondern steckt auch in einer sehr esthetischen Verpackung.

**Rolf Thomas**

*Jazzthing (Deutschland) – Februar 2008*





## **Kontrapunkt für Zeitgenossen**

*Loren Stillmans Jazz-Debüt*

„Shape Shifter“ heißt eine Nummer auf dieser CD und die Musik ist genau das: Sie ändert ihre Form, und das auf eine kaum spürbare Weise. Man merkt es erst, wenn der neue Charakter da ist. Was in dieser Nummer passiert, lässt sich mühelos durch die ganze CD „Blind Date“ mit Kompositionen des New Yorker Saxophon-Jungstars Loren Stillman verfolgen. Ob es wie in der titelgebenden Nummer auf zeitgenössischem Niveau romantisch und einfühlsam zugeht oder wie in „Major“ ein komplexer Rhythmus locker latin-mäßig durchzufließen scheint, immer zeigt Stillman einen sehr reifen, sonoren Saxophon-Ton. Die Band aus den Großmeistern Gary Versace (Klavier), Drew Gress (Kontrabass) und Joey Baron (Schlagzeug) tut ein Übriges dazu, um Stillmans Kompositionen im besten Licht erscheinen zu lassen. Ensemble-Kultur und Aufeinander-Hören werden hier groß geschrieben. Jazz-Kontrapunkt für Zeitgenossen und eine rundum überzeugende Scheibe eines Musikers, für den nach diesem Eindruck eine große Karriere zu erwarten ist.

Loren Stillman: Blind Date, mit Gary Versace, Drew Gress, Joey Baron, Pirouet Records.

**Stephan Freissman**

*Südkurier (Schweiz) – 28. Dezember 2007*





## **LOREN STILMAN**

### **Blind Date**

★★★★

Der Stückeritel „Don't Be So Nice“ könnte seine Devise sein. Der 27-jährige Loren Stillman gehört zu den neuen talentierten Alt- und Sopransaxofonisten der NYer Szene. In London geboren, bezog er seine Ausbildung in New York, wo er heute zu den aufstrebenden jungen Saxofonisten gehört. Der ehemalige Student von Lee Konitz und Dave Liebman arbeitete bereits mit einer Reihe von namhaften Leadern und hat in den letzten vier Jahren nicht weniger als sieben CDs aufgenommen, meistens nur mit eigenen Stücken. Stillman hat eine Nische gefunden zwischen dem gesicherten modernen Mainstream und Errungenschaften der Avantgarde bis zu Anthony Braxton. Sein Saxofonstil mit luzidem leichtem Ton und nuancenreichem Ansatz dürfte von Konitz und Wayne Shorter abstammen, die Verwendung von weiten überraschenden Intervallen verweist auf die Linie von Dolphy bis Braxton. Kompositorische Anregungen kommen aus dem Spektrum von Monk bis Shorter und Braxton, aber auch von Frank Zappa und Béla Bartók. Der Grundton der sieben eigenen Stücke ist eher getragen, und nicht nur formal, melodisch und harmonisch liess sich Stillman etwas einfallen. Ebenso variantenreich ist die improvisatorische Verwertung, riskant, aber auch selbstsicher und elegant. Ein grosses Plus sind die engagierten Interaktionen der bekannteren Kollegen: Gary Versace ist Stillmans bevorzugter Pianist, und das Mitwirken der Könner Drew Gress und Joey Baron ist eine weitere Referenz. Das ist interessante Musik, welche ein mehrmaliges Anhören belohnt. Auf die nächsten Taten von Stillman darf man gespannt sein.

*Jazz'N'More (Switzerland) – März/April 2008*





## **LOREN STILLMAN**

### **Blind Date**

Loren Stillman (as), Gary Versace (p), Drew Gress (b), Joey Baron (dm).

Les 21 et 22 juin 2006

★★★★ (RE-)BONDISSANT

**Loren Stillman (27 ans)** figurait dans notre numéro de septembre au rang des "dix saxophonistes qui font bouger l'alto". On attendait que ce disque le confirme; c'est chose faite. Passé par les leçons de Lee Konitz et David Liebman, Stillman n'est pas étranger à l'héritage (distancié) de Lennie Tristano: des lignes mélodiques aussi fluides que surprenantes, le recours à des effets de contrepoint dans les compositions, une sonorité étrangement détimbrée, un sens de l'espace et des beautés harmoniques surprenantes... Même si elle reprend certains principes, sa musique est bel et bien ancrée dans le jazz d'aujourd'hui et sa proximité de pensée avec ses confrères Steve Lehman et Logan Richardson est évidente même si elle se résout différemment. Comme d'autres, son approche rythmique est particulièrement audacieuse, ses phrases étant d'une bizarrerie ravissante. L'exceptionnel quartette qui l'entoure contribue, cela va de soi, à la réussite de cette "Blind Date". On connaît les vertus de Joey Baron (si vous cherchez un véritable héritier de Max Roach, en voilà bien un), de Drew Gress (quoi qu'il en soit, ce contrebassiste n'a pas la notoriété qu'il mérite) mais c'est Gary Versace (que l'on a surtout vu jouer de l'accordéon chez Marla Schnelder) qui peut se montrer le plus renversant. Même s'il n'a pas les séductions immédiates de musiques plus faciles ou plus branchées, ce disque s'impose comme un jalon important dans l'émergence d'un grand musicien.

***Vincent Bessières***

***Jazz Man France – November 2007***

