



ORIGIN 82891

NIMBLE DIGITS

GEOFF STRADLING & the StradBand

LC 29049



- 1 **BLUE NOTE** 6:13  
Geoff (pno); Alex Budman (alto); Barbara Laronga (trpt)
- 2 **BRECKER SKETCH** 7:42  
*(In memoriam Michael Brecker)*  
Glen Berger (ten); Bruce Lett (ac bass); Ryan Dragon (trb)
- 3 **POINCIANA** 6:27  
Tom Luer (alto); Stan Martin (trp); Geoff (pno)
- 4 **NIMBLE DIGITS** 5:16  
Scott Whitfield (trb); Kye Palmer (trp); Alex Budman (sop); Adam Alesi (drm)
- 5 **BATON NOIR** 4:35  
Alex Budman (clar)
- 6 **HERE IN SPIRIT** 5:50  
Barbara Laronga (trp); Tim McKay (bs clar)
- 7 **DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER** 6:41  
Kye Palmer (trp); Francisco Torres (trb); Kirsten Edkins (ten); Kristin Olson (conga)
- 8 **IGUAÇU** 5:05  
Geoff (Osmose synth); Jeff Driskill (tenor-right); Dan Kaneyuki (tenor-left)
- 9 **WRAP PARTY** 7:25  
Aaron Janik (elec trpt); Kirsten Edkins (sop)
- 10 **HABANERO** 7:31  
Tim McKay (bari sax); Tom Luer (fl); Erik Hughes (trb); Matt Fronke (trpt - right) & Javier Gonzalez (trpt - left); Joey De Leon (timbales)

WOODWINDS:  
ALEX BUDMAN / PHIL FEATHER / KIRSTIN EDKINS  
TIM MCKAY / JEFF DRISKILL / DAN KANEYUKI  
TOM LUER / GLEN BERGER

TRUMPET / FLUGELHORN:  
JAVIER GONZALEZ / KYE PALMER / STAN MARTIN  
BARBARA LARONGA / MATT FRONKE  
ROB SCHAER / AARON JANIK

TROMBONES:  
ERM NAVARRO / DAVE RICHARDS / LORI STUNTZ  
JULIANE GRALLE / FRANCISCO TORRES  
RYAN DRAGON / ERIK HUGHES

RHYTHM:  
GEOFF STRADLING / BRUCE LETT / ADAM ALESI  
COOPER APPELT / ROSS SCHODEK / KRISTIN OLSON  
MICHAEL SPIRO / JOEY DE LEON / NATE WERTH

All compositions & arrangements by Geoff Stradling,  
except (3) Composed by Buddy Bernier & Nat Simon

[geoffstradling.com](http://geoffstradling.com)

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The decline in popularity of big bands in the late forties and early fifties had an upside: it allowed large-ensemble jazz to follow its muse. Big bands, no longer defined by their ability to lay waste, unamplified, to dance halls, began making art for art's sake. In the decades that followed, composer/arrangers as disparate as Pete Rugolo, Gil Evans, Toshiko Akiyoshi and Maria Schneider brought outside influences and new vigor to the form. In the new century, large ensembles endure, spawning new sub-genres almost daily.

Enter Geoff Stradling's extraordinary StradBand, new to recording but long a fixture on the Los Angeles jazz scene. Stradling, equally adept at stylistic set pieces and compositional flights of fancy, seems to have digested big band history whole. He wields his ensemble the way the best bandleaders always have, playing to individual musicians' strengths but maintaining a strong thematic (harmonic, contrapuntal, textural)

through line. L.A.'s legendary musical talent pool is dozens deep at every chair, and many of its brightest stars are here.

**Blue Note**, the album opener, is a nod to the gritty ensemble playing and bluesy heads that typified Art Blakey's tenure with Blue Note Records (1959-1967). It's also a guided tour of StradBand. Sectional division of labor is traditional—witness the trombones, saxes and trumpets playing hot potato with the bridge melody. The shout chorus is a lulu, the rhythm section “hard bops” with conviction, and the leader takes the first solo, a tradition as old as big band music itself.

Stradling calls **Brecker Sketch** a “non-chronological trip” through Michael Brecker's musical history. Brecker, who died in his fifties in 2007, bestrode more than a few jazz styles, and is lionized here by a through-composed opus in which angular and lyrical ideas coexist much as they did in his work. Tenor soloist Glen Berger brings the fire, channeling Brecker sans slavishness.

**Poinciana**, a 88-year-old Latin jazz standard often associated with Ahmad Jamal, is given a contemporary finish here, with electric bass and woodwinds announcing themselves proudly, and post-bop harmony transfiguring traditional Afro-Cuban changes. The band, in full flight, plays like a

well-oiled machine, and maestro Stradling shows, not for the last time, that he has a way with a montuno.

No big band long-player would be complete without a proper burner, and **Nimble Digits**, at 280 BPM, fits the bill. The title track (which Stradling calls a “traditional flag-waver”) winks at us here and there, but mostly storms forward with Kenton-like ferocity. The interlude separating the trumpet and soprano solos contains some startling sectional counterpoint, the dynamics in the tag are Basie-huge, and the concluding cadence is nothing short of startling.

**Baton Noir**, a thoroughly modern clarinet feature for Alex Budman, claims as its influences film soundtracks like *Streetcar Named Desire* (Alex North) and *Body Heat* (John Barry). Its 7/8 Latin groove and shifting all-minor tonal centers ought to be a minefield for a soloist, but Budman's sinewy barline-defiant improvising is heroic here.

Stradling speaks of “the feeling with a truly great recording that you are in the room, whether or not the musicians are still living.” **Here in Spirit** is his nuanced, lush Miles/Gil homage, and its home stretch is one of many sections in which it's impossible to ignore the expertise with which *Nimble Digits* was recorded and mixed. Soloists

Tim McKay (bass clarinet) and Barbara Laronga (trumpet [Harmon in, natch]) both shine, almost nonchalantly.

**Don't Shoot the Messenger** is an uptempo nod to Cedar Walton's best-known composition, “Bolivia,” with a dizzying Bill Holman-style interlude. It's gloriously restless, sliding between a Dorian Latin vamp and double-time bebop, between ensemble thunder and small-group intimacy. The percussion break featuring Kristin Olson (congas, chekeré) and Adam Alesi (drums here and on all tracks) is the inhale before the spine-tingling conclusion.

There are swing-for-the-fences arranging flourishes in **Iguacu** that belong on the StradBand highlight reel. These include a lovely recurring pedal point, multiple built-in groove shifts (samba, baión, songo) and overlapping, shout chorus-worthy background figures behind the soloists. In a nod to the digital present, Stradling takes a soaring chorus on his Osomose synthesizer.

Speaking of electronics, it's hard to miss the influence of Joe Zawinul on **Wrap Party**. The track's hybrid swing/funk groove is reminiscent of Weather Report circa *Night Passage*, and the tune itself seems to spring organically from the vamp. Well, the A-section does, anyway: the B-section is darn

near the opposite of a vamp, full of deceptive cadences and blind alleys. Stradling and Kirsten Edkins converse on synth and soprano (à la Zawinul and Shorter), and Aaron Janik summons Brothers-era Randy Brecker with an electric trumpet solo.

**Nimble Digits** concludes with **Habanero**, a serpentine masterpiece featuring the full band in salsa-plus mode. The piece seems to peak early, but then we hit the 15/4 mambo figure, a rhythmic trompe-l'oreille that provides the ostinato for a joyous battle of the sections (Latin jazz=trumpets win). Snarky Puppy's Nate Werth joins Kirsten Olson and Michael Spiro in a Batá drum trio. The arrangement and the album finish big, half-urging us to begin the whole program again. You hold in your hand a hi-fi, high-octane tour de force; lucky you, hearing it for the first time.

## Don Breithaupt

## SPECIAL THANKS

From Geoff: I could not have made this album without the continuing support of my wife, Mimi. Rick and Enid Wood encouraged me so much over the years, and helped me fulfill my dream of making this album. Without their support as executive producers, none of it would have been possible. I'm so grateful. Dozens of musicians have played in this band over the past thirteen years. Thank you all.

From Ben: Thanks for the love and support of my parents, and the mentorship of Gary Lux.

## ENDORSEMENTS:

Francisco Torres & Rob Schaer: Yamaha / Kristin Edkins & Tom Luer: D'Addario / Michael Spiro & Joey De Leon: LP, Vic Firth, Remo and Sabian / Javier Gonzalez: Stomvi / Matt Fronke: S.E. Shires / Lori Stuntz: Greenhoe / Adam Alesi: Sabian, Aquarian, and Regal Tip / Geoff Stradling plays Studiologic and ExpressiveE keyboards / A great many Vanguard microphones were used on this project



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America o/b/o Bernier Publishing and Chappell & Co.

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#### WOODWINDS:

**ALEX BUDMAN:** piccolo, flute, clarinet, soprano & alto sax

**PHIL FEATHER:** flute, alto flute, alto sax

**KIRSTIN EDKINS:** flute, clarinet, soprano sax, tenor sax

**TIM MCKAY:** clarinet, bass clarinet, baritone sax

**JEFF DRISKILL:** flute, alto flute, soprano sax, tenor sax (all except 1,4,7)

**DAN KANEYUKI:** tenor sax (1,4,7)

**TOM LUER:** flute, alto sax (3,10)

**GLEN BERGER:** tenor sax (2)

#### TRUMPET / FLUGELHORN:

**JAVIER GONZALEZ** (lead on 2,4,7,8,9,10)

**KYE PALMER**

**BARBARA LARONGA**

**MATT FRONKE** (all except 1,4,7) (lead on 3,5,6)

**STAN MARTIN** (all except 1,4,7)

**ROB SCHAER:** trumpet only (1,4,7) (lead on 1)

**AARON JANIK:** trumpet only (1,4,7,9)

#### TROMBONES:

(All except 1,4,7) -

**DAVE RICHARDS**

**ERM NAVARRO**

**LORI STUNTZ**

**JULIANE GRALLE:** bass trombone

**RYAN DRAGON** (1,2,4,7)

**ERIK HUGHES** (1,4,7,10)

**FRANCISCO TORRES** (1,4,7)

#### RHYTHM:

**GEOFF STRADLING:** piano, Rhodes electric piano;  
ExpressiveE Osmose, U-he Diva & Zebra synthesizers

**BRUCE LETT:** acoustic & electric basses (1-8)

**COOPER APPELT:** electric bass (9)

**ROSS SCHODEK:** electric bass (10)

**ADAM ALESI:** drums

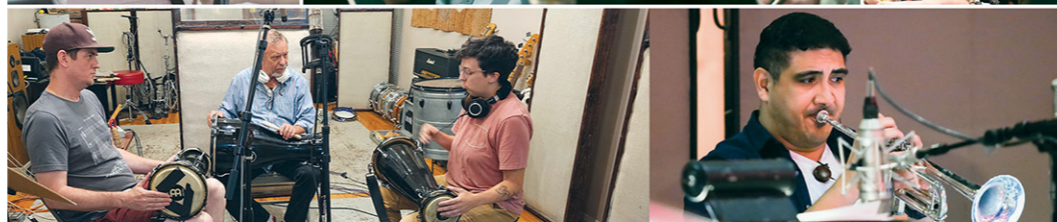
**KRISTIN OLSON:** percussion (all except 1,4)  
conga (all), shaker, caxixi, woodblock, triangle,  
seed pods, rain stick, sus. cymbal, cowbell, tamborim,  
repinique, chekere, wind chimes, gran casa, bata

**MICHAEL SPIRO** (3,5,8,9,10) bongo, shaker, cowbell,  
pandeiro, tamborim, triangle, chekere, guiro, bata

**JOEY DE LEON** (3,8,9,10) timbale (all), cowbell,  
woodblock, tamborim

**NATE WERTH** (10) bata

## the StradBand



I started writing for big band when I was in high school, continuing into college and winning the National Association of Jazz Educators composition award in the fall of 1974. I continued to compose and arrange for the medium for about 10 years after that, then my interests turned to other things. In 2005 I'd been hearing others work in large jazz ensemble writing, and thought "I can write that well," so I jumped back in. I wrote two arrangements for Wayne Bergeron that were recorded in 2007, and just kept writing. By 2010 I had written a lot of new music, but the only way to get it played was to start a band, so at 55 years old I started a big band. (That's a joke waiting for a punchline.) We got together and played once a week for a year before we gigged. We've been performing since then.

I had wanted to make an album, but just had no way to finance it. I thought eventually I'd have a banner year, and be able to pay for the recording myself. That didn't happen, but the pandemic did. Coming out of the lockdown, and the tremendous loss of lives, I realized that life can change in an instant and you'd better get moving. I'd never wanted to ask for help, but I broke down and launched a Kickstarter campaign. With those contributions, and with additional help, we were able to make this album. My deepest thanks to all our supporters.

Geoff Stradling, Los Angeles, Ca, January 2024

Produced by Geoff Stradling / Executive Producers Rick and Enid Wood  
Recorded by Ben Burget at EastWest Studio 1, Los Angeles, CA, July 20 & 21, 2023  
Recording Assistant: Logan Taylor  
Keyboards recorded by Geoff Stradling at StradMan Music, July - October 2023  
Additional recording by Glen Berger, Jeff Driskill, Kye Palmer, Aaron Janik, Stan Martin,  
Barbara Laronga & Cooper Appelt  
Mixed by Ben Burget at 206 Studios, Van Nuys, CA  
Mastered by Dave Donnelly at Woodland Hills, CA  
Piano tech: Teri Meredyth  
Photos by Curt Sletten / Additional photography by Ben Burget, Geoff Stradling  
Cover design & layout by John Bishop