

Joe Sullivan: Whisky Jack Waltz



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5,547 Views



Trumpeter, composer, arranger and educator Joe Sullivan grew up in a large Franco-Ontarian family in the Northern Ontario town of Timmins. As a youth, music was a part of daily life. Sullivan began his formal training on piano and at the age of fifteen he also started playing the trumpet. In his formative years, Sullivan led an active musical life that included performances in classical piano competitions, rock bands and high school concert and stage bands. Sullivan received a Bachelor of Arts degree in classical trumpet at the University of Ottawa in 1981. His interest in jazz led him to the Berklee College of Music, then to the New England Conservatory of Music, where he received a Master's degree in Jazz Studies in 1987. After receiving his degrees, Sullivan moved to Montreal and has been active as a performer, composer, arranger and band-leader ever since. Sullivan is a prolific composer and leads and writes extensively for both his jazz sextet and his jazz Big Band. Sullivan has seven compact discs to his name, the most recent being *Whiskey Jack Waltz* (Perry Lake Records 2013). Sullivan has served as conductor and arranger with the Kirk MacDonald Jazz Orchestra; has been a member of the Vic Vogel Big Band for some twenty-five years; has appeared as a trumpet soloist with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, and the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal; and has performed with numerous jazz artists of international repute, including [Slide](#)

Hampton, Don Thompson, Lorne Lofsky, Pat Labarbera, Kirk MacDonald, Rémi Bolduc, John Medeski, John McNeil, Alain Caron, George Garzone, and Ranee Lee. Sullivan currently directs the McGill Jazz Orchestra 1 and teaches jazz composition, arranging and trumpet at McGill University, where he is an associate professor.

Whiskey Jack Waltz, is a collection of nine originals penned by Sullivan and features a quintet of guitarist [Lorne Lofsky](#), [André White](#) on piano, [Alec Walkington](#) on bass and [Dave Laing](#) on drums. The project's title refers to a playful species of bird that inhabits the forests of Sullivan's native Northern Ontario. The music throughout the project is fresh and accessible while still staying firmly rooted in the jazz tradition of lyricism and hard swing.

"Khivan Adventure" begins the set with a nice medium-tempo waltz, Sullivan states the melody with a muted trumpet over an excellent feel from the Walkington and Laing rhythm section, Lofsky's creative guitar voicings are full and supportive. Lofsky takes the first solo; his warm-toned guitar builds in intensity, register and activity while still maintaining a cohesive melodic flow all the way through. Laing's creative drum set commentary seems to inspire Lofsky's rhythmic choices as his inventive solo yields to Sullivan's muted trumpet. White seamlessly passes the comping role to Lofsky for Sullivan's solo, which starts by developing a melodic fragment through the changes. Sullivan continues developing each phrase to a climax and then resolving the melodic statement with a strong cadence. Sullivan and Lofsky's interaction might remind one of the great team of [Ed Bickert](#) and [Paul Desmond](#), but spoken with today's modern jazz language. White takes the musical helm with a fine piano solo, thoughtful melody and rhythmic figures continue in the same colors and style that Lofsky and Sullivan created, giving a very cohesive flow to the tune. The melody is restated and then brought to a logical ending with Lofsky soloing over a vamp to the end.

The creativity continues with the angular melody of "Get Lost" set to a medium-up swing tempo. Sullivan's solo is full of fire over the well-placed

chords from Lofsky. Sullivan reaches deep into his chromatic bag for this one! Twist and turns to various chord tones with an excellent control of rhythms and the chromatic language of jazz. White again picks up where Sullivan left off and continues the flow and joyfulness that was clearly established by Sullivan's musical statement. White builds to an excellent section of left hand melodies and chords against streams of sixteens in his left hand building to a clear cadential figure and handoff to Lofsky's warm guitar. Lofsky's rhythm is spot on and in the pocket as his eights exude swing; each phrase has shape and forward motion, with ample use of quotes. Laing's drum solo keeps things moving with a fiery snare center statement that takes us back to the angular melody stated by all for the first A section. Excellent writing and a playing, all is done as it should be resulting in a very enjoyable musical listen. The success of *Whiskey Jack Waltz* is certainly Sullivan's exceptional compositions, well-formed melodic melodies through creative chord changes and interesting forms. However, Sullivan has also done an excellent job of putting a group of musicians together that is of the highest caliber and speaks the same musical language and above all, listens to one another. These key elements give *Whiskey Jack Waltz* a very enjoyable listen from the first to last note, well worth the time!

Track Listing: Khivan Adventure; Lonely Roads; Get Lost; A Lullaby; Le Bash; Stealth; Whiskey Jack Waltz; The Gloves Are Off!; The Good Doctor.

Personnel: Joe Sullivan: trumpet/flugelhorn; Lorne Lofsky: guitar; André White: piano; Alec Walkington: bass; Dave Laing: drums.

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