

Q & A with Lisa K. Hilton on her latest trio release
life is beautiful
with Lisa Hilton/piano, Rudy Royston/drums, Luques Curtis/bass

Q. Congratulations on your latest release: how many does this make?

LH: I've recorded twenty – five albums now!

Q: Congrats – that's quite a few! You must enjoy the process...

LH: I do! Ever since I was a little girl I have enjoyed creating art, music and experiences too.

Q: Yeah, I read your liner notes and saw that you started composing very young.

LH: Well those were very simple tunes – I was not a Mozart! It wasn't until I was a teenager that my composing really started to improve – I'd play a bit for my friends and they were always encouraging.

Q: What do you mean when you say you “like to create experiences?”

LH: I love to compose individual tunes, but the CD or album to me is something you experience over and over. A book, concert or movie you experience normally once, but a musical experience like an album, or art you hang on your wall, continues to add to your life for a long time, or maybe forever if it's a favorite. Yes, recording an album is always a lot of work, but I enjoy crafting and collaborating on a new experience every year for the listener - it actually energizes me. Someone told me that our music has become "*the soundtrack to his life*" – I like that!

Q: Nice! Speaking of collaborators, you've got your same trio back with Rudy Royston & Luques Curtis. What's it like working with them?

LH: They are terrific players of course, but they are also nice, and have the highest work ethic. I think all musicians right now are hungry to play, so it feels really good when we have the opportunity to get together all day in the studio when we record. Despite the masks and other challenges, musicians need to create music. It sounds simplistic, but that's how we thrive.

Q: How long have you worked with Rudy & Luques?

LH: Hmm... I think the first time I performed with Rudy was probably 2011 or 2013 in Hollywood with our quartet including JD Allen on sax, and with Luques we first played together at the Smithsonian in D.C. in 2018. We've had some great times performing – I think we've played together at Carnegie Hall/NYC two or three times - the last time was in early 2020 with a very nice ovation!

Q: Were your writing to a concept for *life is beautiful*?

LH: As the pandemic continues on, like most of us, I wish I could do something positive that would help others. I wish I could wave a magic wand and make everyone well, but that's not the way this world, or science works.

Q: Yeah, I hear you.

LH: The only thing I thought that might help others, is for us to create jazz that is an uplifting experience wherever you might be listening: working at home or driving to work, having a picnic or a fancy dinner, being in nature or at the gym - an experience or playlist for our lives. We all need a break from the news, and a reminder that no matter what is going on in our world, we can still find or create beauty around us. So this music is a collection inspired by different genres, eras, and cultures: it's jazz for the twenty-first century, and it's based on enjoying the often forgotten beauty that is around us every single day.

Q: I like that. It was interesting to me that you mentioned women like Lil Hardin Armstrong, Joni Mitchell and Clara Schumann in your liner notes, who were/are great leaders as musicians, but who are often overlooked for all the contributions they've made.

LH: It has been implied by some that there hasn't been leadership by women in classical, jazz or opera, but that isn't true. We might not hear music by women composers in our great theaters, performing arts centers or jazz clubs very often, but we should! These women, and many others led inspiring lives and made plenty of cultural contributions – their stories should be told and their work honored.

Q: Last question: the album photos are very unique – how did you get those?

LH: We were hiking, and it was a little wintery and cloudy, but there was a luminous late afternoon sun still glowing off the ocean. The photographer, Aaron Regan, spotted a lovely random moment and had me stand on the edge of a cliff overlooking the Pacific. The photos actually remind me of this time in our world too – it's a bit cloudy, but if you are looking... life is beautiful.