

RUSSELL SCARBROUGH

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RUSSELL SCARBROUGH BIG BAND TO RELEASE “FUN TIMES” JUNE 1

The long-awaited debut album by the Russell Scarbrough Big Band **FUN TIMES** will release on June 1, 2023 on Bandcamp. The 10 tracks on this album were recorded remotely during the pandemic, and features jazz luminaries such as **Jim Pugh** on trombone (Steely Dan, Woody Herman), **Ralph Humphrey** on drums (Frank Zappa, Don Ellis), **Clay Jenkins** on trumpet (Clayton-Hamilton Big Band, Count Basie), **Rich Thompson** on drums (Marian McPartland, Count Basie), **Matt Vashlishan** on saxophone (Dave Liebman), among other heavyweights from NYC, LA, and around the world.

Scarbrough's motto is, “If it's not fun, we're not doing it right!”. For this special project, he used 44 musicians over a span of 20 months to record some of the most fun, adventurous big band music heard in years. The narrative arc of the album serves as an antidote to the constant bad news and dark rhetoric most endured during the pandemic. Scarbrough says, “Fun times...said only with the bitterest of irony. Yet in the midst of all this, making music was the catalyst for hope.”

FUN TIMES revels in big band rock and funk (with a sci-fi vibe), with a generous helping of swaggering, guitar-laced blues. A spirit of exuberant, energetic optimism pervades the album, interwoven with quieter moments evoking nostalgia, wide-eyed wonder, and hope. It's a message Scarbrough believes is best proclaimed through the classic jazz ensemble of brass and reeds. But it's a big band of the 21st century, and Scarbrough speaks a contemporary jazz language.

FUN TIMES even includes the rarest of modern jazz expressions: slapstick humor. Scarbrough makes a cameo as a “lecturer” on the track “Startups”, delivering Twitter-inspired snark courtesy of “The Daily Show” comedy writer **Jason O. Gilbert**.

Russell Scarbrough is based in Rochester, NY, where his 18-piece band performs his innovative large ensemble music. Its various sub-units perform soul-jazz or the classic big band vocals of 1960's Vegas. A graduate of the Eastman School of Music, he directs the jazz ensembles at Houghton University and Canisius College in western New York.

A public three minute **preview** of the album may be heard at:
<https://tinyurl.com/FunTimesPreview>

Pre-orders for the June 1 release of **FUN TIMES** are available for digital downloads or compact discs:
<https://russellscarbrough.bandcamp.com>

Russell Scarbrough is available for interviews.
www.russellscarbrough.com

In response to many questions:

On The Making Of FUN TIMES

The overall cohesive sound of the ensemble was made possible both by technology and by the many work hours made possible by the pandemic. The absence of one or the other would have made an album of this scope and complexity untenable.

Firstly, the technology. All this music was composed in the 10 years prior to the pandemic, and in most cases had been performed live multiple times. For instance, the first track on the album, Max-Q, was composed and premiered live in 2016. The score had long ago been entered into notation software (Finale, in my case), which is primarily used to make clear, engraved printouts of the sheet music for conventional performance... but a secondary function of that software is to play the scores back, in somewhat robotic form, and to export that playback data for use in more performance-focused software.

That exported data I was able to bring into a digital audio workstation, or DAW (Logic, in my case), where I then had a robotic, but perfectly aligned version of all the individual band parts. This made a time-frame grid for the entire track, with the placement of every beat of the piece laid out in advance. From that, I could send, say, the 4th trumpet player a custom click track to put in his headphones at home, hearing everything except his own part in robotic form, which he would then play along with, recording his part in isolation, and then email that recording back to me. I'd take his isolated track containing only the 4th trumpet part and import that into Logic, swapping out the old robotic part for his real one. For every part in the score, on every track of the album, until all the robot tracks are eliminated and only real ones remain.

(This process is nothing particularly innovative on my part, in fact many small scale recordings, like commercials, have been recorded this way for years. Doing it on this scale is considered unwieldy in most normal circumstances, however).

Secondly, the time. This isolated way of recording every horn and rhythm instrument on the album is a blessing in some ways. At home, the ambient cues musicians normally use in a group setting to aid in exact rhythmic precision — peripheral vision, vibrations coming through the floor, a conductor, etc — were completely absent, meaning I had to carefully edit every part for atomic-level synchronicity. I could do this with impunity in the DAW since they were so completely isolated — that level of editing would have been impossible for a studio recording where everyone would be in the same room, but also unnecessary. And since I was spending far more time at home during that period than I ever have before, I had the time to devote to that kind of minutiae — hundreds of hours, all told.

In Max-Q, which is a complex score and a very complex recording, I had individual tracks for all the brass and saxophones (15 in all), plus multiple takes of the saxophone solos, multiple electric guitars with varying effects, vibraphone and percussion, piano, bass, and 6 drum set tracks. On some other pieces on the album, there were as many as 6 keyboard parts, plus electronic effects, and vocal parts. I was able to control that complexity and bring out detail in the score that might easily have been obscured in a concert setting. I had the flexibility and power (and time!) to build a musical experience with all the tools I had available, which were more robust than I might have had in a traditional studio setting, and definitely more than in a live performance.

So to answer the oft-asked question — No, I did not have to build up from the drums or rhythm section first, since the DAW contained the complete (robotic) rhythm section parts, and everything else, from the beginning. I could start anywhere I wanted, and add real instruments in whatever order they came back to me, piecemeal. Often the very first parts were my own trombone parts, since I played the trombone section on my own pieces, I just did those right away. And I could afford to be patient and wait months for one person to send their part along, since I wasn't on a particular timeline. In some cases, I waited over a year.... I didn't want to pressure anyone to hurry along or burden anyone with having to record for me. Life was rough and I wanted it to be fun for the musicians, something to look forward to. I think that helped everyone's performances despite the strained circumstances, and you hear that on the album.

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