# FLY biography

In the era of individual "star" instrumentalists, the idea of a truly collective trio can be a difficult concept to fathom. Yet collectivity is what the FLY trio strives for; and collectivity is what they so unabashedly and unquestionably achieve. Ballard, Grenadier and Turner represent three rather distinct musical personalities- simultaneously complimentary and contrasting –who have created a cohesive unit that expresses each part while creating an uniquely realized whole. In other words, they celebrate the group, without sacrificing the individual.

"FLY is progressively bringing together many musical elements, traditions, histories and mysteries," says Turner. "Multiplicity is presented under an unassuming hat. Meaning, we are working toward saying it *all* without saying it all, expressing complexity by simplicity. Musically speaking, we are creating songs that can be heard on a number of levels and from a variety of different viewpoints."

Although, drummer Jeff Ballard, bassist Larry Grenadier and tenor saxophonist Mark Turner have individually charted very distinct and highly successful musical careers—one, both or all have graced the performances and recordings of Chick Corea, Joshua Redman, Brad Mehldau, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Pat Metheny, Charles Lloyd, to name just a few-- the formation of the trio seems, in retrospect almost inevitable. FLY needed to happen.

The trio can actually trace its origins back to Grenadier and Ballard's teenage years in northern California. The two learned music together and often played gigs before they both migrated to the East coast in 1990. It was there the two met Turner and soon began to keep close company. They bonded, early on, both personally and professionally. However, it wasn't until several years later that they "officially" came together as a trio. The occasion was a Chick Corea recording project called *Originations*, a collective record where each member of the Origins band contributed his own compositions.

"I had been doing so many gigs with full ensembles, I wanted to do a trio date," says Ballard. "So I asked Larry and Mark if they'd play one of the first songs I ever wrote, (Child's Play). The chemistry was definitely there, so they decided to experiment further with the trio format, booking a few gigs here and there in New York City and then for a more extended tour in Italy. The three liked what they heard—their connection on and off stage was obvious --and as a result, FLY was born.

"Jeff and I had been so involved in other people's music for so long, it was prime time for us to try and get out and do our own thing," says Grenadier. "After doing some live gigs together as a trio, the timing just felt right. We could call our own set instead of playing someone else's personality. There's

nothing wrong with that, but we wanted the opportunity to shape our own visions and come up with something special that truly represents our own personalities."

Although each musician comes with his own unique ideas and compositions, the process and end result is often very collaborative. The creation of "Fly Mr. Freakjar" is a case in point. Although originally penned by Ballard, the tune went through many permutations before it reached it final state.

Ballard brought in the basic composition, and he and Turner began to work on it. "I've had this 'pet' groove for many years, which is fun to play because of the interaction between the hands," says Ballard. "I had a the beginnings of a melody, but I was stuck. Mark was at the house one day. We sat down at the piano, and he helped to shape the melody by offering different bass and melody notes, basically freeing me up from clinging to what I had written down. That opened up a world of possibilities."

Once the pair finished, Ballard took the piece and gave it a middle section, and then passed it on to Grenadier who in turn added a third part: a series of bass lines based on the harmonies from the beginning portion of the song. Turner put on the finishing touches by adding melodies to those bass lines. If you listen carefully, you can hear in the melodies impressions from other tunes in the band's repertoire.

"Fly Mr. Freakjar" is a showcase for how the trio interacts. Instead of bop-like round-robin soloing, the three collectively respond to the composition, giving each member equal say in the proceedings. "Sometimes it's the saxophone carrying the melody," says Turner. "Other times it's the bass or the drums. Most trios with a horn revolve around a lot of blowing and that often overrides the compositions themselves. We wanted to avoid that. We wanted to make the band sound bigger, so we spread out the frontline duties among all three of us." He adds, "Besides, that's just the way we relate to each other when we play."

And as for the band name? Turner says that it's a perfect fit, especially in light of the piece *Fly Mr. Freakjar.* He notes, "At first we were going to call ourselves that, but we all wanted something shorter. So, why not FLY? It sounded good and it can have many meanings. The first thing I thought of was that street-talk phrase, that's fly, which means, that's cool. Then there's fly, as in soaring into the heights. That's what our music is like. Same with the insect fly that's jabbing and bobbing. There are a many definitions attached to the word "fly" that fit us." He pauses and then adds, "Plus, just like our music, FLY has a little bit of mystery attached to it."

FLY is a working trio in every sense of the word. And the first tangible result of their musical experimentation was the their eponymously titled debut CD from 2004. A recording that both solidified their vision, as well as pushing them--upon its completion--to take their ideas even further in live performances.

The recording, which appeared on many end of the year top ten lists and garnered much critical acclaim, provided them the opportunity to go on the road and further hone their musical craft.

With a deep love for the history of jazz, FLY fosters an all-inclusive approach to music. FLY continues to develop its compositional techniques by exploring ways to expand the tonal palette; playing with the potentialities of form and two voices (melody and figured bass).

Or, as Ballard so clearly expresses, "Everyone embraces each other's music. We all offer our input. We put the music out there and each of us is free to grab whatever we want. We want to create music that is basic, raw, and immediate."

So with tours both behind and ahead of them, FLY is preparing music for their sophomore release that will be recorded in 2007. New songs for this project include Turner's multi-sectioned "Super Sister" and Grenadier's "Transfigured", both of which explore extended form, and Ballard's odd-metered funky "Benj".

A concentration, a reduction, a celebration of the pure elements; this trio plays the deepest kind of modern jazz with a kind of skeletal tracery, removing all the thick harmony and bringing it down to two voices and a beat.

Have you heard music like this before?