

I have been dreaming about, planning, and re-working my rather obsessive idea of this record for well over twenty-five years, and it was always going to be called Lovers. It is meant to be as personal in its sound and in its song selection as it is universal in its endeavor to assay or map the parameters of “mood” as it once pertained, and currently pertains, to the peculiar and powerful connection between sound/song and intimacy/romance. In this, I hope Lovers offers something of an update of the “mood music” idea and ideal, while celebrating and challenging our iconic notion of romance.

I could not have done this record without the assistance—assistance verging on intervention—of my good friend and producer David Breskin, who really made this happen, and of Michael Leonhart, who sensitively and expertly arranged and conducted all the pieces. I had always intended to arrange all of the music myself. But the challenge proved so daunting that I could not muster the courage to even begin, despite the gentle urgings and subtle cheerleading of Mr. Breskin, aka “db”. After a while, I began to feel that db was more excited about and committed to this record than I was! Then five or so years ago, through my wife Yuka, I met Mr. Leonhart, a superb trumpet player and producer of all kinds of music. When Michael learned about my dream, he leapt on it, almost begging to help make that dream come true. How could I say no?

Where I had very specific orchestral or harmonic arranging ideas (“Secret Love”; “Cry, Want”; “Touching”; “Snare, Girl”; “Beautiful Love”) he not only executed my ideas perfectly, he went way beyond what I could have done. For other pieces, including, and perhaps surprisingly so, most of my own songs—pieces like “Hairpin & Hatbox” and “The Bond” (which is dedicated to Yuka); as well as covers such as “I Have Dreamed” and “The Search For Cat” (a Mancini piece that we discovered we shared an obsession with and which has never appeared on the official soundtrack releases of Breakfast at Tiffany’s)—I just told Michael things like “Do your thing” or “You know what to do.” As a result, there were only a handful of last-minute revisions made, and they were made during the recording session. Michael, db, and I became like one mind in the process. Along with the marvelous musicians assembled—many of whom are some of my most longstanding and cherished comrades and all of whom are astonishing artists in their own right—and the recording expertise of Ron Saint Germain, this idea of a record called Lovers became real.

Angel City Arts (from my hometown of Los Angeles) and The Shifting Foundation are the less visible but equally crucial members of the Lovers team. Without their generous financial assistance, this simply could not have been realized, and I am extremely grateful to them.

My deepest thanks and gratitude to all the musicians and technicians, to my family both here and gone, to all my friends, to those few intimate souls close to me past and present (you know who you are), and especially to those who dare to love (even if only for a few moments) and to dream of love. Specific thanks to db, Michael, Saint, Joe, Pat Dillett, Angela DeCristofaro, Chelsea Hadley of The Shifting Foundation, everyone at Blue Note, and Ben Levin/TMM for their amazing energy and unstinting support.

And thank you Yuka.

One last thing: As we were recording this music, I kept thinking of how much this project is imbued with the spirit of Jim Hall. “Secret Love” is, in fact, an homage to him. And I so looked forward to giving him a copy of Lovers. But he passed away the day before we finished recording, so now that transfer must depend on some subtler, more sublime and ineffable listening format. Here’s to Jim and to all of you, past and present, with love from me.

XO Nels (New York City 06/18/15)