

Matt Baker *Almost Blue* (JAZZELM Music)

Pianist Matt Baker's new recording, *Almost Blue*, is his fifth as a leader, and second since 2010 when he moved to New York City from Sydney, Australia. Baker abandoned a comfortable career to position himself in the pool of big fish who leave an international array of smaller ponds to test their mettle in the jazz capital. That it was a wise decision is evident: Baker—well-known in Australia and Europe for an approach deeply informed by Oscar Peterson, his idol and first influence in matters of intention, execution and time feel—interacts seamlessly with young New York A-listers **Luques Curtis** on bass and **Obed Calvaire** on drums, placing his exhaustive knowledge of chords and scales and stylistic dialects at the service of swinging melody without letting you see him sweat. Master guitarist **Lage Lund** augments the unit on six selections, while formidable tenor saxophonist **Joel Frahm** projects his singular instrumental voice on three.



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| 1. A Beautiful Friendship | 4:25 |
| 2. Theme from The Apartment | 2:58 |
| 3. Wouldn't It Be Nice | 4:26 |
| 4. I'll Be Seeing You | 8:16 |
| 5. The End of a Love Affair | 5:58 |
| 6. Didn't We | 6:04 |
| 7. Almost Blue | 4:11 |
| 8. In The Wee Small Hours of the Morning | 5:13 |
| 9. Lonely Avenue | 5:54 |
| 10. Foolproof | 3:18 |
| 11. Wouldn't It Be Lovely | 5:42 |
| 12. Reflections | 5:39 |
| 13. Autumn in New York | 4:54 |
| 14. Theme from The Apartment (solo) | 3:38 |

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The intersection of Baker's musical and personal journeys in New York is the subject of the 14-tune program, which Baker and eminent producer **Matt Pierson** culled from the Great American and late 20th Century Pop Songbooks. "I chose these songs because of the lyrics," Baker says. "Each one represents a certain place in my life during the period that led up to the recording. They convey the album's narrative, and have equal weight as pieces in the story."

In 2016, a worldwide audience can witness the fruits of Baker's New York R&D as he supports *Almost Blue* with a new trio, including Ahmad Jamal alumnus **James Cammack** on bass, and the crackling young drummer **Darrian Douglas**. "Since coming here, I feel I've begun to play with the band as opposed to having them accompany me," Baker says. "I feel that Darrian, James and I are creating whatever it is we do—various meters and rhythmic complexities, harmonic development, textural development—in the moment together."

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