

Bassist Mark Egan Forms Potent Trio with *SNL* Drummer Shawn Pelton and Dynamic Six-Stringer Shane Theriot on Rootsy *Cross Currents*

After five decades of touring and recording as an in-demand sideman and leader in his own right, acclaimed bassist Mark Egan has finally released an album that encapsulates his myriad of musical influences in one all-encompassing package. “In many ways this is a new production sound for me,” said the bassist who studied privately with Jaco Pastorius during the mid ‘70s while attending the University of Florida before becoming a charter member of The Pat Metheny Group. “My early influences are from playing r&b, soul and rock before becoming indoctrinated into jazz in the Miami years.

This trio record explores those rootsy R&B funk-rock grooves coupled with my jazz and world sensibilities and utilizes the various fretted and fretless basses that I’ve worked with over the years. It’s a culmination of the many worlds of my experiences and is the reason that it’s titled *Cross Currents*.”

Completing this potent trio with Egan are drummer Shawn Pelton (a 30-year veteran of the *Saturday Night Live* band and first-call New York City studio player who has recorded with everyone from Bob Dylan, Rod Stewart and Bruce Springsteen to Elton John, Billy Joel, Van Morrison, Sheryl Crow, David Byrne, Pink and Luciano Pavarotti) and Louisiana-born guitarist Shane Theriot (musical director for Hall & Oates who has also recorded and/or performed with The Neville Brothers, Dr. John, Boz Scaggs, Allen Toussaint, Rickie Lee Jones, Willie Nelson and Todd Rundgren).

Together they cut a wide stylistic swath on *Cross Currents*, from funk (‘Homebrew’, ‘Pocket Call’) to ambient (‘Big Sky’) to swamp rock (‘Gulf Stream’), second-line (‘Ponchatrain’) and ballads (the Jimi Hendrix flavored ‘Sand Castles’ and the moody ‘Roll With It’) with allusions to Cajun (‘Nonc Rodell’) and Indian Raga (‘Eastern Blue’).

Recorded at Power Station New England in Waterford, CT (a perfect replica of the storied New York City recording studio where Bruce Springsteen, Paul Simon, David Bowie, Madonna, Sting, Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Stevie Ray Vaughan, John Mayer recorded iconic albums), *Cross Currents* is Egan’s most versatile and ambitious offering to date. While his past outings as a leader, like 2006’s *As We Speak*, 2010’s *Truth Be Told*, 2014’s *About Now* and *Direction Home*, 2018’s *Dreaming Spirits* and 2020’s *Electric Blue*, have been primarily organic trio and

duo affairs, *Cross Currents* is a power trio with orchestrated layers of rhythms and textures by the participants.

“The intent of this recording was to capture the interplay and energy of the trio and orchestrate it by adding additional guitars, bass and percussion to enhance what the songs were calling for.

Everyone had so many great ideas for orchestrating and arranging the material. The record has electric and acoustic guitar as well as bass and percussion overdubs. We wanted to make atmospheric pads to create a backdrop for us to improvise over. Once I had decided on recording this trio format I spent nine months of composing and arranging the compositions. Shane and Shawn also spent a lot of time conceptualizing and contributing songs. We had three days to record and orchestrate the eleven compositions so the preproduction allowed us to have the time to be creative in the studio and focus on the group interplay and soloing.”

For Egan, interplay and soloing means digging down on his fretted bass groove lines to lock with the rhythm section and using his fretless electric bass for his signature singing sound that has graced his own recordings since 1985’s groundbreaking and decidedly bass-centric *Mosaic*. That quality comes across throughout *Cross Currents* and is particularly evident with him carrying the melody on tunes like ‘Gulf Stream’, ‘Big Sky’, ‘Pocket Call’ and the title track or by his uncommonly lyrical improvising on tunes like ‘Ponchatrain’, ‘Homebrew’, ‘Sunflower’ and ‘Eastern Blue’.

The bassist had high praise for his comrades Shawn and Shane on *Cross Currents*. “They both came very prepared for the sessions. I had sent them demos along with arrangements with suggestions for solo sections and overdub possibilities, and we rehearsed one day before going into the studio to work things out. Shane and Shawn both brought so much to the table and did their homework by creating and practicing grooves, melodies and instrument choices as well as coming up with great orchestration ideas. They are both so fundamentally strong in everything they do that it made the recording process creative and a lot of fun.”

Egan had previously recorded with Theriot on the bassist’s 2018 album, *Dreaming Spirits*, an Indian flavored trio project with tabla player/percussionist Arjun Bruggeman. “I loved Shane’s contribution on *Dreaming Spirits* and thought he would be a perfect fit for the trio on *Cross Currents*. And though Shawn and I have played together on many sessions in New York over the years, he had never played on any of my records before.”

The three players had actually first established some chemistry on a show backing NYC poet Frank Messina back in pre-pandemic times. “This was late 2019, before the COVID shut down,” Egan recalled. “Frank asked me to recommend people for this show that he was performing in New York City and I recommended Shane and Shawn. There was no rehearsal but just a very loose structure to it all with a lot of improvisation. Frank gave us a lot of room to improvise and play off of his poetry. At one point that evening we were playing trio — just Shane, Shawn and myself. That was the ‘light bulb moment’ for me, when I thought, this is very happening. I want to record a project with this trio. In the fall of 2022 I was in touch with Shane and Shawn about recording a trio project and I started writing songs for the group. Shane also sent me a few of his songs that inspired me to write others in a similar style. We co-wrote ‘Big Sky’ as Shane sent me the song as a demo with acoustic guitar chords and a groove and I wrote a melody and added an extended section for his acoustic guitar solo. Shane also contributed ‘Ponchatrain’, ‘Sunflower’ and ‘Homebrew’. Shawn contributed ‘Nonc Rodell’ which is a tribute to his uncle. ‘Nonc Rodell’ showcases Shawn as a world class groove drummer as well as the depth of his creative drumming abilities. Shawn pre recorded his tracks at his studio with his drums, squeezebox (accordion), and added tenor guitar parts as well. We brought those tracks into Power Station New England studio and Shane and I added guitars and basses on top of Shawn’s prerecorded tracks. It’s a very creative track that features Shawn’s amazing drumming and I love it.”

An in-demand New York City studio musician who has played on multi-gold and platinum-selling recordings by Sting, Arcadia, Marc Cohn, GRP Christmas, Mecano and Joan Osborne, Egan has also recorded with a wide variety of artists from pop stars like Roger Daltry, Sophie B. Hawkins, Marianne Faithfull, Judy Collins, Cyndi Lauper and Art Garfunkel to jazz notables like David Sanborn, John McLaughlin, John Abercrombie, Randy Brecker, Gato Barbieri, Freddy Cole, Pat Martino, Jim Hall, Joe Beck, Mark Murphy and Larry Coryell. A member of the Gil Evans Orchestra for 13 years, he has 14 albums as a leader to his credit and another 10 as a co-leader of Elements, the fusion band he formed in 1982 with his Pat Metheny Group bandmate, drummer Danny Gottlieb.

And now *Cross Currents*, on his own Wavetone label, may be his crowning achievement to date as Egan continues to push the boundaries of his creativity.