

The summer evening Chase and I first met, we were walking opposite ways along the western curve of Manhattan's Columbus Circle. I had just heard a bootleg (off Dan Chmielinski's iPhone) of a session Chase had organized at Pat Metheny's apartment a couple weeks earlier. With the letters from Jazz at Lincoln Center's awning hefted over his shoulder and a horn case strapped to his back, I stopped him as he walked—not knowing who he was, of course. It was a few seconds of introductions until, pleasantly surprised, we connected over the bootleg. I think they'd played "Missouri Uncompromised." Chase shared some nuggets Pat had imparted to them—about dynamics and articulation, and sensitivity from note to note—and told me he was living uptown. Before long, he became a mainstay at my apartment in Harlem. We would make lunch, listen to music, and play duo until night fell. We spent a lot of hours with my teacher and roommate, subterranean master drummer Marvin "Bugalu" Smith, raving over his stories, working through his concepts of flow and our own, trying things out. Chase and I both grew a lot that way: challenging, daring, the other to expand.

By that time, five years had passed since he had recorded *Crosscurrent*, his debut. A native of Utah, he attended two years of school in Los Angeles before dropping out to play professionally there in 2009; but three weeks later, he changed his mind, returning to his home state to regroup. Amidst a comic range of odd jobs—baking pies, washing dishes, crunching numbers, and detailing cars—Chase prepared. He played gigs and made his album. Then, eager to leave the West and dive into what was happening in New York, he boarded a plane and relocated. He auditioned for and was accepted into Juilliard; he was set on finishing his Bachelor's and building a career. And then, in 2014, on the very spring day he graduated, Chase, taking a walk up Columbus Avenue, spotted Brad Mehldau at 86th Street in a helmet, riding his bicycle.

So he sprinted after him.

"Brad!" he shouted for two blocks, and when he finally had his attention, they got to speaking for a few minutes. Brad asked what Chase was up to. Chase mentioned he had just finished his degree at Juilliard.

They laughed that now Chase could have any gig he wanted, of course.

Of course.

Work really does keep us going. And, conversely: when gigs aren't there, we're left alone, playing both sides of the conversation that we have with ourselves about our own purpose. After school, work was thin. Far too thin for close to two years; and, in days off of the catering job keeping him afloat, Chase would take hours-long walks in Riverside Park to hold off, as best he could, the glum shadow cast over him by an immovable cloud he couldn't spot, no matter how stubbornly it seemed to block from him a career, a community, and a musical energy he was committed to expressing. In these times, he recalled to me, the point was just *to stay okay*. "And to cultivate," he continued, "a romanticism inside myself, even when the circumstances weren't romantic."

Fittingly, too. For, when our purpose as artists wriggles from our hands—often when external validation or money are low—our minds bend toward romance to touch wondrous forms. So,

without much musical opportunity to ground and grow him, Chase found solace and quest in the pursuit of love, seasons of surrender to its dramas, its tragedies and its bliss; and it is from precisely this friction, the eternal rub between our love and our work, that *A Life Between* was born.

Things felt bleak after school. But Chase's musical highlight of that year—two summer shows at the 55 Bar with vocalist Thana Alexa—planted another seed for *A Life Between*.

At that time, Thana was dating drum virtuoso Antonio Sanchez, whom she later married. Chase recalls Antonio seated at the bar for one gig. "Kind of scary, you know?" he laughed to me. A year and a half passed. At the screening for Don Cheadle's *Miles Ahead*, in which Antonio played drums, Thana met Chase's then girlfriend, Morgan, an actor in the film. Through Morgan, she passed an invitation to Chase to come sit in on an upcoming hit at 55.

(I remember a spottily raining August afternoon, eating baked salmon under the bamboo plant in Morgan's spaciouly unfolding apartment, eventual sunbeams in between the three of us, listening to Nir Felder's *Golden Age* on a punchy little speaker. "What is honest?" was the question; Nir certainly was. After much inquiry, the answer became to take a leap: you aren't who you think you are, Chase. Play who you actually are. Do what you actually want. And *that is* what he ended up doing.)

Luck had it that, when Chase showed up at Thana's gig, Antonio would play on the same tune. And then another year passed. Or more—until, from nowhere, when Seamus Blake couldn't make a few dates, Antonio texted Chase to sub in his band.

These: these are the moments that dumbfound young musicians, when we flicker on spot, jaws open, fog of our dreams curling slowly out.

Summoned, the saxophonist reoriented; he credits Antonio with "really altering the course of his life at the time." Chase spent the next two months studying Antonio's music and steeping himself in its aesthetic—one which would deeply influence his own writing.

Meanwhile, he stayed in touch with Brad. After attending a duo show at the Blue Note, he handed the pianist a manila envelope, inside which were sealed a copy of *Crosscurrent* and two new songs. Chase saw him play several times, and they touched base intermittently.

I'm not there yet, Chase wrote him in an email once, but I am going for it. And I would like to play with you.

So in 2017, when Chase began more seriously focusing his energy—fueled by literally years wrestling himself in love and in music—toward recording a second album, it was Dan Chmielinski, his roommate at the time, who asked Chase, simply: "Why not call Brad?"

And indeed? From front to back, the album renders a world in which the great pianist has already carved out natural landmarks, a world in which one looks down and sees his footprints, mysterious and washed half-away. In this world, Brad seems to shine knowingly from the moon and hide in the trees. For Chase to ask his hero to play was courageous. *Obviously*. But it was natural.

Natural and electric. *A Life Between* searches across desert, forest, sea, and space—holding, in one hand, an iPod that plays Radiohead's *OK Computer*, John Coltrane's *Transition*, and Mahler's Fifth Symphony. Steadying, in the other, a Norman Rockwell stick, around the gnarled end of which hangs a cloth knapsack, snugly knotted, carrying staff paper and a tape recorder...(to not forget the village melodies gifted him along the way)... Ah.. and *there*, hiding, at the bottom.

A lonely postcard of the Utah sunrise.

"I really want to be in Radiohead," Chase joked to me the night we first met to listen to the record in his Washington Heights apartment. "But how can I be a saxophonist and do that? I wanted to use everything I already had, bring in everything I'm interested in, all of it. *Crosscurrent*, there were a lot of figures, time things, structured in. But then, there's the stuff Bugalu had us on...just *playing*. Interacting, opening up, stretching out, getting to that place. So I wanted to write songs more as vehicles for group improvisation. Let the band get a vibe and take off.

"And I like playing with people that there's some grit with," he continued. "Nir was someone I've always looked up to. I took a lesson with Nir. Steve Lyman, who played drums on *Crosscurrent*, he brought Nir out West to do some shows, and I saw them. He was the real deal, the whole package: intuitive, emotional, innovative. And it was a year later, Nir was coming back—more gigs with Steve. So I called him. He came on this funky mini-tour with my group in Utah and New Mexico in 2010. And survived it.

"And Dan. We met at Juilliard. I always felt like he was an advocate for me. That he genuinely liked what I did, that he wanted to play. A brilliant musician and an honest friend.

"I want people I can go to war with," he pressed. "I can go to war with Dan. If anything went down, he was the one I could trust to help me handle what was going on. It was important that someone like that be there.

"There's a certain balance to it, and having a balance is important. Dan brings a lighter energy as a human being. You kind of need someone who's happy, need someone who's darker, too—artistically, you need different ingredients. And that can breed tension. And at the time of the date...I trust Antonio. But I didn't know him *that* well, we had only done five gigs. I had played with Nir on a limited basis. But Dan—Dan was my person."

Chase composed the music in two distinct periods. "Ripcord," "As You Are," and the title track, "A Life Between" were all penned shortly before or after he moved to New York. After a five year writing hiatus, he took another two to finish everything, subjecting all of the music to numerous revisions. For Robert Schumann's "Im wunderschönen Monat Mai" ("In the Beautiful Month of May"), which closes the album, Chase simply handed the band the original classical score.

They rehearsed once, the day before the session. Nir had played "As You Are" on tour with Chase in 2010 when the song was still more of a free, open kind of thing; Brad had cut three tracks on one of Antonio's records in 2015; I saw Dan and Nir play some of the music with Chase at Shapeshifter Lab in Brooklyn in 2016; but really, the magic of this record is exactly that these great musicians convened in and around the saxophonist's vision through a seemingly impossible web of chances and great yawning gaps in time; and that, when they did, it was as if, all along, they had been expecting each other.

Together, they conjure a dangerous universe: one where prophets preach from scrap metal pulpits atop fearsome, churning galactic junkyards; where war commanders marshal unfathomable armies; and where bluesy, whimsical tricksters, charlatans with Cheshire grins, spin lies to mystify the path. And yet, within dystopia, what Chase sees and what the band manifests is a rogue courage, the real hero of this album, which appears in many forms: as a lullaby wafting up from a bed of roses; as a bold sailor singing country waltzes to narrate his fantastic travels; as nighttime in a rainstorm is meant for escape and the confession of love; as a wounded, morning-light paean, blood behind; as the dedication to a mission that looks far, far forward; and finally, weapons broken, as the wet-warmth of an eye-to-eye kiss.

Indeed, by the recording day's end, Chase's reed was wrecked and his saxophone out of alignment—so that, when tracking "Im wunderschönen," he was in earnest, humble command of an instrument that did not truly work. Exhausted, he steps aside so his friends, new and old—though who really *knows* now what is old and what is new—may speak—and returns to bid us a gentle yes, goodnight, and we say yes, thank you. Yes, thank you, I love you.

Yes. Thank you, I love you.

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