



For more information:

Jo Foster
Concord Records, Inc
310-385-4218
jof@concordrecords.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FORMER HEAD OF IAJE, SHELLY BERG, JOINS CONCORD RECORDS FOR RELEASE OF "**BLACKBIRD**"

GRAMMY® Winner Gregg Field and Chuck Berghofer Join Pianist to Create the Shelly Berg Trio

"Shelly Berg's powerhouse piano playing has thus far been generally overlooked due to his not recording often enough." — All Music Guide to Jazz

When Shelly Berg releases his first CD on a major label in 2005, the earlier descriptions of his limited recorded output—not to mention his being pigeonholed as an aggressive pianist with jaw-dropping technique—will no doubt be rewritten. Indeed, in stores on January 25, **Blackbird** reveals a somewhat surprising side to the former head of the International Association of Jazz Educators as he is joined by drummer Gregg Field and bassist Chuck Berghofer.

Previously, listeners may have described Berg as a swinging, extroverted musician in the exuberant, indomitable spirit of Oscar Peterson, one of his early inspirations. **Blackbird**, however, shows Berg to be a much more complex musician who is attuned to a broader range of emotions than his earlier recordings suggested. The CD, exquisitely performed and produced, captures Berg's trio in a relaxed, sustained performance of songs with personal meaning to the pianist.

"With **Blackbird**, I just wanted to make a beautiful recording where there's not a gratuitous note. I didn't want to be thinking of 'things to do' on this record. I just wanted to explore the feelings of the songs," says Berg who admits he's been waiting for decades to record a few of the tracks on the new CD. He achieves his goal by considering the melodies—and the lyrics, though unsung—of each of the songs. "'All My Tomorrows' resonates with me because it has one of the most beautiful lyrics that a love song can have. To me, a great song occurs when all of the elements come together."

Berg personalizes the songs on **Blackbird** with warm voicings, effective dynamics, and a storyteller's ability to craft an unforgettable dramatic experience from a promising simple theme. For example, the Trio stretches the rests of title track (written by Lennon and McCartney) to allow for glittering ornamentation that illuminates segments of the melody before they stretch out into upbeat straight-ahead improvisation. Those phrases are suspended as if independently overlaid on the underlying rhythm for a contemplation of their harmonic wonders.

In an approach similar to "Blackbird," "She's Always a Woman" consists of discrete melodic phrases connected by rests of harmonic resolution, though played with an obvious sense of joy. Berg slows Pat Matheny's "Question and Answer" into a gorgeous jazz waltz whose harmonic possibilities for prismatic richness, the colors inextricably linked through gradual progressions, previously may have been overlooked in faster versions.

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2-2-2 Shelly Berg Trio Releases *Blackbird* on Concord Records

The undeniably effective underlying spirit of *Blackbird* reflects the camaraderie among the Trio's members. Once again, Berg defies expectations by recording with musicians who may not necessarily be associated with this style of jazz. The bandleader notes, "I can't say enough about Gregg and Chuck. I think their playing is going to raise some eyebrows about what these two guys can do. Their careers are going well, but I think it's always great for them to get recognition in ways that they haven't before."

Born in 1955, Shelton G. Berg's love of jazz came from his father, trumpeter Jay Berg, who performed with touring musicians like Charlie Parker and Sonny Stitt. A young prodigy, he was accepted into the Cleveland Institute of Music at the age of six. He moved to Houston in his early teens and soon thereafter started playing professionally, while still in High School, with Arnett Cobb, who provided him with the opportunity to jam with Lockjaw Davis, Al Grey and other members of Count Basie's Orchestra, as well as with players from Woody Herman and Buddy Rich's bands. Graduating summa cum laude twice from the University of Houston with bachelor and masters degrees in music, he worked for 12 years as the director of instrumental music at San Jacinto College in Pasadena, Texas. However, at the recommendation of Bill Watrous, Berg moved to Los Angeles, where he became a professor and the Chair of Jazz Studies in the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California. From 1996 to 1998, he was the president of the IAJE.

Musically, Berg has written commercial jingles for a host of Fortune 1000 companies, including Wendy's, Dole, Texaco and Kelloggs. He has scored for films and television shows like *Men of Honor*, *Almost Heroes*, *Fudge* and *Dennis Miller Live*. And, he has written for such performers as Kurt Elling, Bonnie Raitt, KISS, Lou Rawls and Richard Marx, as well as the American Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic and the Dallas Philharmonic. In addition to publishing eight books about jazz theory and improvisation, as well as numerous music magazine articles, Berg has received numerous awards, including the IAJE Lawrence Berk Leadership Award, one of three *Los Angeles Times*' "Educators for the Millennium," and the Los Angeles Jazz Society "Educator of the Year." Berg has accompanied and recorded with numerous performers, including Watrous, Tierney Sutton, Peter Erskine, Patti Austin, Clark Terry, Monica Mancini, John Clayton, Lorraine Feather, Frank Potenza and Carmen Bradford.

Berg says, "Someone wrote a beautiful thing about six years ago: that I was 'the best jazz pianist you never heard of.' I think the release of *Blackbird* will give my rise from 'obscurity' a giant step. Now I'm at a time in my life where playing means the most it ever has to me. I want to play as much as I can. Hopefully, *Blackbird* will become a vehicle for doing that." To support the release of the CD, the Shelly Berg Trio will initially tour in the Midwest and on the East Coast. Berg says, "I would like to play in clubs as well as other venues because *Blackbird* is kind of an intimate record."

But his goals for *Blackbird* go beyond increased recognition. "I think that one of the greatest things about music is that it can have a very healing effect on human beings. I just hope this music makes people glad they listened to it and that it makes them feel good."

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