

Stanton Moore Trio – Emphasis (2008)

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1. *(Late Night At The) Maple Leaf* 2. *(Proper) Gander* 3. *Wissions (Of Vu)* 4. *(Sifting Through The) African Diaspora* 5. *Over (Compensatin')* [play](#) 6. *(Smell My) Special Ingredients* 7. *(I Have) Super Strength* 8. *(Who Ate The) Layer Cake*

[play](#)

9. *Thanks! (Again)* 10. *(Put On Your) Big People Shoes* 11. *(Here Come) The Brown Police*
Personnel: Stanton Moore: drums; Will Bernard: guitar; Robert Walter: Hammond B3, piano, toy piano and clavinet; Michael Skinkus: shakere (6); Robert Wilmott Walter: vocals (7).

When New Orleans native son Stanton Moore settles down behind his drum kit, what's sure to follow is enough electrifying energy and raw power to rebuild The Crescent City all by its own bad self.

Moore's rocking and rolling drums are pushed upfront in the mix, but they don't drown out Will Bernard's guitar and Robert Walter's keyboards. This trio is very much a democracy and there's plenty of room for each musician to go off on his own, while still staying within the framework of the band. Nothing here is meant to be taken too seriously, as *Emphasis! (On Parenthesis)* is all about the grooving and jamming. The real difference between "(Put On Your) Big People Shoes" and "Proper (Gander)" may be nothing more than how much longer or shorter one song is, compared to the other.

Walter's deliciously bent toy piano on the loopy "Wissions (of Vu)" and Moore's funky timekeeping sound as though they were written for an over-the-top Quentin Tarantino flick. "(Sifting Through the) African Diaspora" features a reverberating bass line that will have you searching the liner notes for the musician, but it's only Walter working the bass pedals on the Hammond B3 to perfection. "(Who Ate the) Layer Cake?" is straight-up, Jeff Beck-ish dirty rock

n' roll complete with guitar riffs and thundering drum rolls. "Proper (Gander)" allows Bernard to go off on some high-flying solos as Moore anchors it all, bashing the hell out of his drums. All that's missing is a shaggy, long-haired blond lead singer (which isn't all bad). Moore can change up from funk to rock and back to jazz seamlessly, and seems equally at home with any genre he chooses.

The problem for any critic with an album like Emphasis! (On Parenthesis) is they risk exposing the reader to paralysis by analysis. This isn't the kind of album you have to think about too much. Moore, Bernard and Walter are clearly having a good time and they want you to as well. This lean, mean and sassy album is meant to be played and enjoyed, not pondered. ---Jeff Winbush

Drummer, composer and bandleader Stanton Moore has a well-deserved reputation for diversity. Besides being a founding member of New Orleans powerhouse jazz-funkmaster Galactic, he's played with Corrosion of Conformity, jammed with other traditional New Orleans R&B and jazz groups, and issued three fine albums as leader. On Emphasis! On Parenthesis, Moore is playing with guitarist Will Bernard and keyboardist Robert Walter, a pair of top-flight collaborators he's worked with in various settings in the past -- in particular on his third album simply called III. Of course the trio isn't new to Moore by any stretch. He also records with Skerik and guitarist Charlie Hunter under the Garage a Trois moniker.

The album's 11 tracks all contain titles with parenthetical statements -- it is an acknowledgement of the gentle ribbing from his Galactic bandmates that he slips parentheses into the name of almost every tune he writes. In some ways the music reflects this; each of these tunes has extensions in it, where the riff or groove starts and gets grafted onto continually with other musical statements, transforming the original vamp, groove, or riff into a more complex and varied composition. This is possible because of the incredible balance in this group. The trio setting doesn't provide the same problems as a quartet or quintet, but it also doesn't provide the safety net. Certainly Moore's breakbeat crazy, full-force kit work is up in the mix as it should be for such a rhythmically complex groove record. He's certainly the bandleader and he composed the tunes, but this isn't a showcase for his drumming. Bernard and Walter are stellar partners. Bernard is one of the most well-respected guitarists among musicians, but he's a low profile cat who is almost unknown to all guitar freaks. Walter's profile is lower still. It makes them perfect for a date like this where everybody shines all the time.

Take the funky New Orleans strut-funk that is "(Late Night at The) Maple Leaf." The cut was developed from Moore's basslines out of a jam he and Walter played with Meters' bassist George Porter. Some chunky yet slinky B-3 chords by Walter dictate its opening groove, followed by funky guitar chords in backbeat driven by a 5/8 stuttering break tempo set by Moore. It is reminiscent of the Meters but layers interlocking step grooves into odd codas, middle fours, and turnarounds. A boogie-woogie piano is layered on top of a bassline played by Walter on the clavinet and morphs itself into a smoking bluesy solo (made up almost entirely of chord runs) before Bernard moves his knotty, jazzed-up guitar lines dead center for a break. "(Proper) Gander" is almost pure voodoo funk propelled by nasty chords and tom-tom rim shots that get turned into a drunken swaggering steamy groove by Bernard's twinned guitar lines.

Spy flick funk is what drives "(Wissions Of) Vu," propelled by a clavinet à la Herbie Hancock's Headhunters and an off-kilter toy piano. Bernard plays his best John Barry styled-film guitar line, and Moore makes the whole thing choogle. The most overtly jazz thing here is the following fourth cut "(Sifting Through The) African Diaspora." There are some jagged hard bop lines juxtaposed against funky breaks, fluid harmonic shifts and changes, and some stellar organ and guitar work moving tonal palettes through a rainbow of shades and colors. Working through a series of stretched minors and sevenths, this cut never loses its swing even at its most start-and-stop, and then slips into serious John Patton murk terrain, digging through the blues and groove bags before moving out towards somewhere on the frontier. It's one of the finest things here and easily the most adventurous, going through so many shapes and shifts and turns that it's difficult to even remember where it began. Another standout is the choppy, late-night soulful "(Smell My) Special Ingredients," that slips Fela styled Afro-funk backbeats and rock dynamics à la the Jeff Beck Group into its construction. Despite this amalgam of styles and tonal colors, it swings like mad. "(Put On Your) Big People Shoes" is pure whomp funky! The snare shuffle here is pure rim-shot tough, and the blues angler in the 12-bar set-up is deceptive in the way it stretches time via Walter's gradations in the chord changes. In a little over 45 minutes, the listener is taken on a ride that's full of thrills and musical adventure to be sure, but more than this, it's a jag of pure pleasure that you can dance and fingerpop to. If you are still sitting on your behind (or aren't at least moving some part of your body in time), you are simply dead. Emphasis! On Parenthesis is another big winner in Moore's stellar catalog. ---Thom Jurek

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