

Charlie Hunter - Baboon Strength (2008)

Written by bluesever

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1 Athens 2:43 2 Astronaut Love Triangle 4:53 3 Welcome To Frankfurt 4:05 4
Difford-Tilbrook 3:13 5 A Song For Karen Carpenter 5:53 6 Baboon Strength 5:32 7 Fine
Corinthian Leather 6:05 8 Porter-Hayes 5:02 9 Abadaba 7:10 Charlie Hunter - 7-String
Guitar Erik Deutsch - Organ, Casio Tone Tony Mason – Drums

After a series of major label releases, the last of which was a recording with a new trio, Charlie Hunter makes significant changes for Baboon Strength. The idiosyncratic guitarist's innate joie de vivre remains constant, however, as he decides to release the album independently and, prior to that, recruits a new drummer.

Tony Mason actually commences the album on "Athens" with a heavy downbeat that is his calling card—predecessor Simon Lott, who appeared on *Mistico* (Fantasy Jazz, 2007), was a much busier percussionist. His muscular approach to the music becomes even more prominent on "Welcome to Frankfurt," where his simple approach accentuates the low notes emanating from Hunter's seven-string guitar. The bottom contrasts effectively with the textures Erik Deutsch coaxes from his Casiotone keyboard.

There's plenty of sing-song melody bandied about between Hunter and Deutsch during "Astronaut Love Triangle" and "Difford-Tilbrook," so much so that a paean to the songwriters of Squeeze is perfectly appropriate: these new originals of the Hunter's boast all the hooks of a pop tune minus the lyrics to sing along with. Perhaps that accounts for references like "A Song for Karen Carpenter" and "Porter-Hayes." Hunter's homage to the Stax duo's gritty creations may be a far cry from the female songsmith's, but they're almost equally likely to fulfill the jazz musician's hunger for a good melody, upon which to improvise and what essentially is how Hunter is composing these days.

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If there's another prevalent motif in California Bay Area native's most recent work, as he's transformed his trios in the opposite direction of the more abstract likes of his Groundtruther project with drummer Bobby Previte, it's an inclination to let it rock like a garage band. But rather than simultaneously create a conflict with his growing fondness for tunes, the altered approach expands the range of his trio. "AbaDaba" features guitar textures far less smooth than Hunter parlayed earlier in his career on eight-string guitar. The considerably sharper edge he now wields provides an effective foil for Deutsch's fluid organ lines. Tony Mason punctuates it empathetically, not to mention gleefully.

"Fine Corinthian Leather" finds the threesome inhabiting a quiet space enhanced by the clear, though definitely not antiseptic sound production. Everyone in the Charlie Hunter Trio resides on common ground and they seem to be simultaneously finding even more in common as they play together. The end result often sounds like more than just three players, a wonder of wonders for those unfamiliar with Charlie Hunter and only a little less so for those who have followed the intrepid guitarist's career. ---Doug Collette, allaboutjazz.com

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