

CHRIS GREENE FOUND GUILTY OF...

By Corey Hall

Immediately, as instructed by Sly Stone's voice on the song slamming through the courtroom's speakers, all attendees "Stand!" Judge Milton John - aka "Still the Judge," or STJ - emerges from chambers, snaps a selfie, low-fives the bailiff, and takes his position behind the bench.

Then, the courtroom's doors open, and the Defendant, tenor saxophonist Christopher Alexander Greene - aka "Greene," - enters, blues marching in a quarter-note acoustic slide step accented with backbeat from STJ's gavel. STJ lifts his index finger high, signaling that "Stand!" is about to end, so all spectators sit, applaud, and then watch as Greene takes the witness stand and enters PlaySPACE 2: Play Harder into evidence. This live album, released on May 6, and recorded at the Evanston venue mentioned in the title, features the Defendant and his quartet: pianist Damian Espi-nosa, bassist Marc Plane, and drummer Steve Corley.

Citing budget imbalances, critics' convenience, and straight-up reality, STJ explains how the trial has been skipped and Defendant Greene found guilty. Three Victim Impact Statements (VIS) from the Plaintiffs - People Objecting to the Life and Interests of Chris' Ensemble, or POLICE - will be read, followed by Greene's response. STJ unfurls VIS One, counts it off, and begins.

"Middling tunes at middling tempos...Never really enough of anything..." STJ then places the disc into his boombox, selects "Divers," hits the Playa! Playa! button, and allows the tune to play for the entire 13 minutes. Here is a brief audio bite:

"We were talking about this tune behind your back in chambers," the Judge's criss-cross examination begins, "and we want to know: Is 'Divers' middling, or, as we suspect, mad?" "I would definitely say mad," Greene responds. "I would also call

it frantic, over the top, or 'lit,' as the kids these days say." "Was the approach here inspired by Branford Marsalis' Crazy People Music? I know you and Branford are cool," STJ says. "Branford is one of my heroes and definitely part of the framework when a song like 'Divers' is brought out," Greene says. "The approach from his band is always on my mind, from Crazy People Music to 'Dance of the Evil Toys,' the first song on his new album. 'Divers' might not have been an overt Branford reference, but he's certainly in there."



"Solid, my brother, solid," STJ says, as he unfurls VIS Two and reads: "(Greene) is the weak link in his own band. Does he even listen to Charlie Parker?" Address the court, please. Have you ever listened to Charlie Parker?" "Didn't he record some stuff on CTI in the '70s?" Greene asks. "Wait! He's the Black Country Hall of Fame guy, right?" "He could be country," STJ responds, "depending on who was in the back seat with him while Miles was trying to eat some actual bird!"

While everyone laughs, a female spectator - later identified as GI Jami-la - rolls her eyes Exorcist style. A dude with a fresh 'stache and goatee sitting next to her also laughs. But upon seeing her reaction, his smile ceases. He then places a boxing glove on his right hand and approaches the stand. "Uh-oh!" everyone yells. "Keep my wife's shame...Out!...YO!...Mouth!" brother/man demands. "Please answer straight-ahead," STJ instructs the Defendant, as the man returns to his seat. "Charlie Parker is always there, your Honor," Greene replies. "I listen to other music, but I always find my way back to him. Even when I'm not listening intently to Bird, I'm hearing him filtered through the men and women who have studied him for years." STJ then plays the next track, "Caravan," another Bird model, where Greene leads on soprano saxophone.

"We typically play 'Caravan' at an up-tempo, super-fast pace, but the original version is a slow, desert-like kind of thing,"

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to cut through the band and add this extra sheen to his playing. In the trio, he brings a lot of those skills as well."

Two years later, Duke released *Money Jungle*, a one-off session with Charles Mingus and Max Roach. While the tension in the studio among the men has been much documented, the recording is still celebrated for its musicianship. (Drummer Terri Lyne Carrington recreated the recording in 2013 and earned a Grammy for her efforts.)

Duke also collaborated with John Coltrane for a quartet date, also released in 1963. The album, named after the two gents, proved to be a positive experience. Duke, in his autobiography *Music Is My Mistress*, wrote, "We recorded some of his tunes with his rhythm section, and some of mine with my rhythm section. No hassle, no sweat— John Coltrane was a beautiful cat. The date flowed so smoothly we did the whole album in one session, and that is rare. I loved every minute of it."

Coltrane, when quoted in the album's liner notes, echoed his colleague's commendation: "I was really honored to have the opportunity of working with Duke. It was a wonderful experience. He has set standards I haven't caught up with yet."

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Developing the space, a one-time art gallery, into a viable performance outlet became the mission of Allan and Sandra Jaffee, a Pennsylvania couple who relocated to New Orleans to turn the informal jazz sessions into a formal venue offering music seven nights a week. "As long as there are musicians playing traditional New Orleans jazz, I would like to have a place where they can come and play for an audience who will come and listen," Allan Jaffe told an interviewer in the mid-1980s. Two years later the couple organized musicians into the first incarnation of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, which would take the music to different cities. A revival of New Orleans jazz followed a decade later, aided by the first "Jazz Fest" in 1970; like any roots music institution, Preservation Hall served as a shelter for the music to thrive ever since.

Today, Preservation Hall serves as a brand for the freedom and

spirit of early jazz. A deal with Columbia Records helped get the music out in the 1970s and 1980s. The Preservation Hall Jazz Band now tours the world, including Chicago's Symphony Center and Thalia Hall in recent years and a 50th anniversary concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City, and has helped expose audiences to the music via collaborations with groups and artists like the Del McCoury Band (bluegrass), My Morning Jacket (rock) and Mos Def (hip-hop). After Allan Jaffee died in 1987, the couple's son, Ben Jaffe, now operates the venue.

Like his parents, the son recognizes the significance of Preservation Hall reaching its sixth decade. "It's not just a celebration of our past, but also a celebration of the next 60 years as well," he told *Southern Living* last year. "I hope that Preservation Hall will be here for generations to come, because I know in my heart of hearts it makes the world a better place."

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Greene says about the Ellington/Tizol composition. "I said to my guys, 'Let's do it slower than Duke did when he first recorded it.'" "Dig," STJ replies, as he unfurls and reads *VIS Three*: "Greene's approach earnest, but work needs some heft." The Judge then asks the Defendant what he has been doing to heighten his heft. "Lots of protein and kale," the latter responds.

STJ then plays the album's closing tracks: "Omi (Fresh Water)," by George Duke, and "You Win Again," by Country crooner Hank Williams. Greene's admiration for George Duke, he explained, grew after playing a tribute concert in his honor with bassist Mike Manson's band. (Manson played with Duke for 10 years.) "Omi" is highlighted by Corley's extended solo, as Greene, Espinosa, and Piane support him sonically on cowbell, woodblock, and cabasa.

Greene discovered "You Win Again" while watching *Ray*, the film starring Jamie Foxx as Mr. Charles. He then bought Brother Ray's *Modern Sounds In Country and Western Music*, which contained the tune. Then he heard Williams' version and presented it to his colleagues.

Before dismissing Greene from the stand, STJ asks about the voice heard at tune's end. The words were spoken by poet Maya Angelou and taken from a conversation she had with comedian Dave Chappelle. He rewinds, reclines, and replays: "...Don't pick it up and don't lay it down," Ms. Angelou is heard saying. "When someone says 'You're the best...' You say, 'Ah!' If you pick that up, you also have to pick it up when they say you're nothing...So I don't pick it up. I don't lay it down." "What does this say to you?" STJ asks. "As long as I'm on this planet, I'm gonna keep try-ing to cause as much ruckus as possible," Greene replies. "If I'm not making people who are used to a certain style or framework of music just a tiny bit uncomfortable, I'm not doing my job."