

This review was featured in the The Bulletin

Telepathic Jazz—An Interview with Patrick Cress by David Jasper, October 29, 2004

"I'm still psychologically negotiating what success is," says a laughing Patrick Cress, leader of jazz quartet Patrick Cress' Telepathy.

Don't let the laugh fool you. Cress is one of those smart, somewhat daunting, jazz-soaked musicians who will quickly have you ashamedly turning down the Top 40 pop-album emanating from your car stereo.

Perhaps, then, that's why Cress named the group's second CD "Liberate the Radio Stations." Telepathy's second Northwest tour will bring it to Bend tonight for the first time. The tour is a precursor, Cress says, to recording the group's third album. Even in a phone conversation, the 29-year-old Detroit native comes off as cerebral as the music he performs, which is hard-bop jazz, with shades of Coltrane and Davis, infused with rock energy. At the cusp of 30, saxophonist Cress says he's learning that "all of us deal with these preconceived notions when we're growing up of what life is supposed to look like. I feel like it was ingrained into me that I needed to be successful. And 'successful' means making money and having a house. And I don't think that's realistic, really."

So long as Cress can earn some kind of living with his bands (he has two others, a rock trio and a paint-dance-music project) and his small record label, Odd Shaped Case, his take on success simplifies. "That alone right there is success, to be able to play the music that I love to play, which Telepathy is that."

Cress says the band's name intentionally hints at the interplay between him and bandmates Tim Bulkley (drums), Aaron Novik (bass clarinet) and David Arend (upright bass.)

However, as Telepathy's sound has coalesced over its two-and-a-half-year life, the larger audience for jazz has been dwindling "right in front of our very eyes," he says. That's true even in his adopted San Francisco, renowned for its West Coast jazz scene. And that has Cress changing his tune.

"The band's great," he says. "That being said, there have to be other elements, besides virtuosic elements, that draw people in. That's what I'm trying to focus on. Part of the problem with Telepathy, for instance, is that there are some very cerebral elements. I think people who work 9 to 5, or whatever, fill in the blank, they work hard trying to make a living. They don't necessarily want to think a lot, or use their brains a lot outside of work or outside of their own passions."

"Jazz requires some effort on the part of the listener, to invest in the music. And when that investment is made, the music is very enjoyable. But to some people, that's not so, it's not really pleasing to the ear or within a certain style of music they love. I'm changing the concept around a little bit to focus more on group melody concepts and just melody, melody, melody, melody."

Another factor the band has going for it, as least as concerns the tour: "Audiences outside the Bay Area actually are attracted more to Telepathy than audiences within the Bay Area," Cress says.

Like his definition of success, the reasons are still under consideration. Cress will keep improvising in the meantime. "The band has really blossomed over the last year. I don't know what the secret has been. It seems like every time we get on the bandstand now, there's this unspoken confidence that it's going to be great. It's just confidence in ourselves. And part of that is believing that we're going to communicate very well onstage, without having to rehearse much. Part of it is that 'telepathic' sense, I guess, very loosely defined," he says, laughingly. "We know each other's playing. We can get on the same page very quickly, and part of that is telepathy."