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S.M.V. (STANLEY CLARKE, MARCUS MILLER AND VICTOR WOOTEN) CONJURE A STORM ON NEW HEADS UP RELEASE

***Thunder* includes guest artists Butterscotch, Chick Corea,
George Duke, Patches Stewart and more**

In the hot days of August, a low rumbling sound off in the distant sky usually means something powerful is rolling in. This summer, when an ominous reverberation makes its way across the landscape and rocks everything in its path, be ready for a storm of a different kind.

Stanley Clarke, Marcus Miller and Victor Wooten – each a powerful force of nature in his own right – have done more in recent decades to redefine the electric bass and push the limits of its potential than any other musician alive today. When these three titans – collectively known as S.M.V. – converge on the low frequencies, the results are no less than earth shaking. *Thunder* (HUCD 3163), their debut collaboration set for release on Heads Up International on August 12, 2008, is a high-energy phenomenon whose impact is guaranteed to resonate throughout every corner of the jazz world.

“We wanted to make a bass record with a sound that would be somewhat unexpected to the listener,” says Clarke, the elder statesman of the three-man crew, all of whom share songwriting credits on the recording. “The biggest hurdle was to make a record with three basses – very low-end instruments, by definition – that would still be as musical as possible, and I think we achieved that.”

The initial idea behind *Thunder* goes back a few years, but the final push came after the three bassists played together for the first time in October 2006 at the *Bass Player Live!* concert in New York City. In addition to the historic convergence of three monumental bass talents on one stage in the same night, the event also included the presentation of the *Bass Player* Lifetime Achievement Award to Clarke.

“Vic had this idea to do a bass thing a while back, but we really didn’t know when we’d do it,” Miller explains. “After we jammed at the award ceremony, it was clear that it would be pretty easy to do musically. Each one of us found a space to operate that didn’t compete with the other. We fell into it pretty naturally. I saw Stanley at the airport the next day and said, ‘You know we should do this soon, right?’ he agreed. We knew Vic was down, because it was his idea in the first place.”

Wooten was definitely down: “That performance made us realize how easy it was to play together,” he says. “We knew that we had to do it again. We were able to naturally find our own space with and around each other. That’s not always easy, especially when three people are all playing the same instrument.”

But *Thunder* isn't entirely about the low end. Adding a little – and sometimes more than a little – to the top is a group of talented guest artists that include keyboardists Chick Corea and George Duke, trumpeter Michael “Patches” Stewart and vocalist/beatboxer Butterscotch (aka Antoinette Clinton).

The set opens with the intricate and layered “Maestro de las Frecuencias Bajas,” written and arranged by Clarke. “This track is cool because it starts out orchestrally and really takes its time building the drama before the basses come in,” says Miller. “Stanley arranged it so that Vic plays the melody line first, then Stanley comes in with the same line in harmony, then I come in to add a second harmony line. The horn section plays the same line completely harmonized. The arrangement really takes you on a trip.”

The title track, though written by Miller, features a classic Stanley Clarke melody from his power rock days, with vocals by Butterscotch. “The tune has a contemporary sound to it, but you can really hear each guy’s sound,” says Miller. “Butterscotch introduces each player, and halfway through we all start slapping away together. This kind of thing usually doesn’t work with three bass players, but it works here, and it’s pretty funky.”

The churning and funky “Hillbillies on a Quiet Afternoon,” written by Wooten, is likely to sound familiar to fans of Clarke’s earlier recordings. “Hillbillies” is based on the melody from Clarke’s “Quiet Afternoon” (a track from his now-classic *School Days*, released in 1976).

Atmospheric and evocative, “Milano” features Clarke on upright bass, played with a bow in a register so high that the resulting sound resembles a cello more than a bass. “This is a track that stands out in my mind,” says Wooten, “because I’ve always been a fan of Stanley’s upright bass playing. The cadenza that he plays is remarkable.”

“Pendulum” follows a moody, late-night groove, with astonishing vocal beatbox work courtesy of Butterscotch that defies any listener to distinguish between her and a drum machine.

The set closes with “Grits,” a track by Miller which he calls “a down-home, funky thang.” Clarke takes the final solo, wherein “he sounds like an old blues guitarist” says Miller.

More than just a musical collaboration, *Thunder* was an opportunity for all three musicians to get to know and understand each other on a newer and much deeper level. “It’s not until you really work intimately with another musician that you really find out what’s going on with that person,” says Clarke. “One of the things about this project that was a pleasant surprise was finding out how deep these guys are, and how far they’ve come in their careers. We couldn’t have made this record ten years ago. It just wouldn’t have been the right time. Each of us has reached a certain point, and I think we’re all celebrating what we’ve accomplished with the bass. This record is a picture of three guys moving forward, both as individuals and as a group.”

With that forward motion comes a deep and powerful vibration – not just in your ears, but under your feet, all around you, and in the very air itself.

Listen to the sound of *Thunder*.

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