



# WAVE MECHANICS UNION

## SECOND SEASON

Progressive and Classic Rock as Jazz

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# Wave Mechanics Union

Lydia McAdams, Ralph Johnson (vocals), Dave Helms, Josh Weirich (sax), Ann Donner, Abby Fraley Kara Moran (flute), George Donner (oboe), Dave Helms, Shawn Plonski (clarinet), Dave Helms (bass clarinet), Jeff Anderson, Todd Beals, Don Smith (trumpet + flugel), Katie Weirich (horn), Ryan Fraley (trombone, waterphone), Tom Thomas (tuba), Justin Kessler (piano, Rhodes), John McAdams (guitar), Cathy Morris (violin), Jenny Powell, Kate Bender, Anne Miller, Biljana Bozinovska, (string quartet), Robert Stright (vibes + percussion), Lyman Medeiros (bass), Ralph Johnson (drums), Andre Rosa Artis (congas), Harvey Pooka (harp)



## ...Progressive and Classic Rock as Jazz

[www.karionpresskits.com/wavemechanicsunion/wavemechanicsunion.html](http://www.karionpresskits.com/wavemechanicsunion/wavemechanicsunion.html)

### 1. WON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN (The Who)

**Ralph Johnson writes:** The tune presents lots of possibilities treatment-wise, but one thing I was consciously trying to contribute to this project was something that, within the jazz context, still rocked pretty hard—I wanted to show that a band with lots of horns could have, in addition to sophistication, some raw cajones—so I went with a heavy Latin-funk approach, and syncopated the hell out of the rhythm bed.

### 2. KILLER QUEEN (Queen)

**Ryan Fraley writes:** I've read that when Freddie Mercury wrote Killer Queen, he set out to pen the song that Cole Porter would have written had he been in a rock band. That's it, exactly. Setting this song in a jazz context was not a difficult task, as the attitude and atmosphere thrown off by both the lyrics and chord progressions clearly bring to mind the sophisticated yet saucy writing of Porter, Gershwin, and other memorable pages from the Great American Songbook.

### 3. THE RAIN SONG (Led Zeppelin)

**Ryan Fraley writes:** Two steps away from being a smoky torch song. The arrangement barely deviates from the original—in fact it's a bar-for-bar retelling. The only significant changes are the instrumentation and the mellow mood. I wanted to leave plenty of open room for Lydia's sultry vocals and Justin Kessler's subtle and innovative piano work. The results are a pure joy for me as a listener.

### 4. THE GREAT GIG IN THE SKY (Pink Floyd)

**Ryan Fraley writes:** Clare Torry's unforgettable, soaring vocal line is transformed into a nimble jazz vibe solo by Robert Stright. Somehow, Bob manages to emulate the melodic shape of that bluesy vocal improvisation curve for curve, yet in a totally new context. The chord progressions, the form, even the key remain the same, while the somber but epic mood of the original gives way to a burning jazz quartet. This one is humbly offered in memory of Richard Wright.

### 5. AVAILABLE LIGHT (Rush)

**Ryan Fraley writes:** A beautifully-written song, so well-written, in fact, it can live and breathe comfortably even within this vastly-different treatment. The lyrics speak of such desire to move and travel, to see the world. To that end, I set our treatment in a Jobim-style Bossa. The typical hard edge of the big band sound is softened by replacing trumpets with flugel horns, baritone sax with bass clarinet, and bass trombone with tuba. Robert Stright adds depth and dimension with his battery of authentic percussion instruments.

### 6. DE DO DO DO, DE DA DA DA (The Police)

**Ralph Johnson writes:** Writing a large-ensemble arrangement of this was a challenge—it stood pretty well on its own, without additional embellishment. I went with a 7/4 feel (an homage to Don Ellis, one of my early arranging influences) but tried to keep the beat driving, just like the original. The orchestration here is punchy and sharp. I used lots and lots of short snippets, and tried to interlock them all rhythmically so that the composite was as interdependent as the original recording. There are all sorts of hand-offs between the trumpet, trombone and sax sections, I included a few piano riffs of a rhythmic, kind of quirky nature. John McAdams added his guitar (he's one of America's best-kept secrets...)

### 7. ELEANOR RIGBY (Beatles)

A "rock standards" album without a Beatles tune? Unthinkable. Ralph's arrangement exists somewhere between a big band and a pops orchestra. We're certainly stretching the notion of a big band here -- with the addition of strings, flutes, clarinets, horns, celeste, harp, vibes, and marimba.

### 8. WHY SHOULD I CRY FOR YOU? (Sting)

This is transcendent songwriting! Sting's chilling lyrics seem even more poignant when allowed to breathe in this free-flowing and sparse treatment. There was no arrangement, per se. Just Lydia's gorgeous voice supported by Justin's subtly restrained piano accompaniment—complete with well-chosen reharmonizations. The effect is striking. It's spare, lonely, and definitely a memorable addition to the project.

### 9. ELEPHANT TALK (King Crimson)

**Ralph Johnson writes:** I'm a huge fan of King Crimson, and of Tony Levin in particular—his stick playing on the original recording of this tune is classic, and lays down a groove so sinfully funky it could cook along for 20 minutes all by itself. This is one of those riffs that, once you split it apart into separate parts for a jazz rhythm section, is actually harder to play than it is for one guy executing the whole thing. So once I established that we were going with a funky 12/8 feel, and I'd mapped out the form, we finally decided, in the studio, to just wing it—Lyman and I shut off the click track and just improvised our drum and bass parts in one pass.

Everything written over the top of the rhythm bed (which was a combination of Levin's stick line and some Robert-Frippness) was designed to add grit, both harmonic and rhythmic—this one needed to sound "sinister," in a sense.

### 10. ISTANBUL (NOT CONSTANTINOPLE)

Jazz as rock then back to jazz... This tune was first recorded by the Four Lads in 1953. Later, it was given the alt-rock treatment by the quirky rock duo They Might Be Giants in 1990. Our version brings the journey full circle—it's back again to jazz, but still carrying the luggage full of stickers from the trip. **Ryan Fraley writes:** The melodic sensibilities of this tune seem to be borrowed from the same bag as "Puttin' on the Ritz." It's such a great song. I wanted to make sure that our arrangement referenced TMBG's version as much as anything. Inviting Cathy Morris to play violin provided us with the biggest single nod to the rock version. Cathy did not disappoint! Her playing is edgy and daring, and the final screeching rip at the end just delights me every time I hear it. I wanted this track to have an edgy feel, but also a good dose of that old-style "hot jazz"—complete with the Gene Krupa-esque two-beat drum feel, the punchy trombone section, and of course Shawn Plonski's fluid clarinet playing.

### 11. HEART OF THE SUNRISE (Yes)

**Ryan Fraley writes:** There is a rumor that Stan Kenton, in the early 1970's, expressed a sincere appreciation for the music of Yes. And why not? There are more than a few similarities between Kenton's progressive orchestras and progressive rock's most influential band. Both were simultaneously admired and criticized for their over-complicated approach to music-making. As admirers of both Kenton and Yes, I found this selection to be an obvious choice for this project. It's a classic example of Yes at their most extreme, most audacious, most sprawling, symphonic peak. There was no choice but to arrange the piece section-for-section. Nearly note-for-note. Within a 10-minute stretch of time, we are treating to a barrage of changes in meter, color, tempo, and mood. Like a classical symphony, though, there is a certain economy of thematic development over time.

## BACKGROUND:

Wave Mechanics Union is a creative collaboration formed by composers Ryan Fraley and Ralph Johnson, and vocalist Lydia McAdams. Along with a large cast of guest musicians, the group records striking new jazz arrangements of rock and popular music. The debut CD, *Second Season*, features a collection of progressive and classic rock masterworks as rendered by a modern big band.

## DESCRIPTION OF CD:

Repertoire from progressive and classic rock icons performed by a modern big band...

Supported by a full-scale jazz orchestra, vocalist Lydia McAdams performs repertoire from Yes, Rush, The Who, Pink Floyd, King Crimson, The Police, Led Zeppelin, and more. The striking arrangements by Ryan Fraley and Ralph Johnson show a deep love for both big band jazz traditions and the layered density of progressive rock.

## SUGGESTED TRACKS:

All Tracks; especially 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 11

## ADD DATE FOR RADIO:

October 27, 2008

## PUBLICIST AND RADIO TRACKING:

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