

GOING FOR ADDS: OCTOBER 25th, 2024

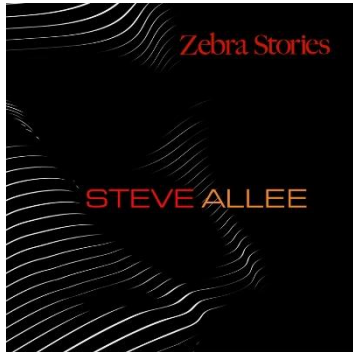
FILE: JAZZ

ARTIST: STEVE ALLEE

TITLE: ZEBRA STORIES

LABEL: SELF-RELEASE

UPC/BARCODE: 1 95269 33072 9



Tracks

1. Freedom 6:52
2. No Mind 4:06
3. Waltz for Bill 6:56
4. Twins 5:52
5. Lyra 3:06
6. Tergiversation 5:54
7. Zebra II 8:59
8. Songbird 5:50

Steve's Picks 1,3,4 — Student's Pick: 2 — Kate's: 4,6,7

Songs composed by Steve Allee – AlleeOop Music
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Except for: Waltz for Bill – Comp. Lyle Mays

Tergiversation – Comp. Gene Perla

Zebra II – Comp. Claude Sifferlen

Personnel

Rob Dixon – tenor saxophone – *Freedom – No Mind –
Tergiversation*

Frank Glover – clarinet – *Lyra – Zebra II*

Rusty Burge – vibes – all tracks except *Tergiversation &
Zebra II*

Erin Benedict – vocals – *Lyra – Twins – Waltz for Bill*

John Brewer – vocals – *Freedom – No Mind*

Steve Allee – piano – Fender Rhodes – organ –
arrangements

Jeremy Allen – bass

Steve Houghton – drums

Recorded 11/12 & 13/23 at Jazzville Studios – Nashville, IN

Vocals recorded 4/23 at Primary Sound Studios,
Bloomington, IN

Engineered & Mastered by Jake Belser

Produced by Steve Allee, Jeremy Allen & Steve Houghton

Dedicated to Claude Sifferlen, John VonOhlen &
Steve Corn

Jazzville Records Catalog #2403

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Background on the Music and Musicians

In the 1970s, John Von Ohlen formed the Baron Von Ohlen Quartet, featuring Claude Sifferlen and myself alternating between acoustic piano, Fender Rhodes electric piano, keyboard bass, and Farfisa organ, with Mary Ann Moss providing vocals. We recorded the *Baron* album on the Stan Kenton Creative World Label.

A few years later, John wanted to expand the sound of the quartet by adding vibes, guitar, percussion, and vocals. This led to the formation of a big band, which recorded *Downtown Blues* and *Live*. The rhythm section was evolving.

Following this, with pianist Steve Corn and drummer Greg Corn, we formed smaller groups called the “Zebras,” featuring hometown heroes like Al Kiger (trumpet, George Russell), David Young (tenor sax, Ellington, George Russell), Russell Webster (tenor sax), and Chuck Carter (saxes, Stan Kenton). This period was creatively rich, allowing us to explore new harmonies and textures.

1980s:

The big band sound was still in my veins, so I decided to form my own big band, The Steve Allee Big Band, performing locally at clubs and festivals in the area.

Steve composed Centennial Salute for the Indianapolis Museum of Art's 100th anniversary, blending big band musicians with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.

1990s:

In the '90s, Steve Houghton, drums, (Woody Herman, John Williams, Bob Florence) Jeremy Allen bass, (Bob Brookmeyer) and I started playing together almost by accident when I “sat in” for a set in Bloomington, Indiana. The musical chemistry was instant—we heard songs the same way without rehearsals. We began performing more frequently and decided to record together. Noticing that our last names spelled “AHA” (Allee – Houghton – Allen), we became the AHA Trio.

Soon after, vibraphonist Rusty Burge (PASIC Hall of Fame recipient) joined a few gigs, and we became BAHA. When saxophonist Rob Dixon (Charlie Hunter, Mike Clark) joined, we became BAHAD—things were spiraling in the naming department!

The AHA Trio recorded *Brother to Brother* on Bandcamp, and later the AHA Quintet album *Freespace*, featuring Clay Jenkins and Bob Sheppard. We also recorded *Driftin'* with Rusty Burge and *What's Next?* With the Rusty Burge Quartet. Our most recent release is *Zebra Stories*, featuring the AHA Trio, Rusty, Rob Dixon, Frank Glover (clarinet), Erin Benedict, and John Brewer (vocalese).

Last May, the Steve Allee Big Band—a 18-piece group including the AHA Trio, Rusty, Rob, and Erin—was conducted by the great John Clayton. Two albums from those sessions will be released in spring and fall 2025.

Song Descriptions

Freedom

Originally composed during a 4th of July weekend, *Freedom* evolved to represent the freedom of the individual spirit, both as artists and as citizens.

No Mind

Written in the '80s, *No Mind* takes its inspiration from a Zen philosophy about achieving a clear and open mind. This is the first recording of the song, featuring Rob Dixon's rich tenor sax sound. The song's harmonies and voicings contributed to what we called the "Zebra" style, a hybrid sound blending vibes, electric piano, guitar, and vocals.

Twins

Dedicated to my close friends, Steve and Greg Corn. This track exemplifies the "Zebra" sound, with vocals, vibes, and Fender Rhodes. Frank Glover's clarinet and Erin Benedict's vocals are featured.

Waltz for Bill

This beautiful composition, written by pianist Lyle Mays in tribute to Bill Evans, was brought to us by Steve Houghton. He and Lyle were close friends from their time at North Texas University and the Woody Herman Orchestra. Our bassist, Jeremy Allen, is featured on this piece.

Lyra

Named after the star constellation, *Lyra* has a reflective and calming quality. Frank Glover's rich clarinet tone and the "Zebra" sound shine through, with contributions from Erin Benedict on vocals and Rusty Burge on vibes.

Tergiversation

Originally heard on Elvin Jones' *Merry Go Round* album, this song by Gene Perla and Allen Wiggins was a favorite. On the *Baron* album, we recorded our own version, with John whistling the melody alongside the Fender Rhodes.

Zebra II

A tone poem by my mentor Claude Sifferlen, *Zebra II* features both myself and Frank Glover on clarinet. This piece has a solemn but hopeful tone, almost classical in nature, and deeply influenced my early musical development.

Songbird

One of my earliest compositions, *Songbird* reflects the Brazilian influence of Antonio Carlos Jobim, Astrud Gilberto, and Luiz Bonfá. This song captures the energy of my early 20s and a passion for world music.

'Zebra Stories' – Liner Notes – Steve Allee

'Zebras,' a playful term coined by my mentors—pianist Claude Sifferlen and drummer John Von Ohlen, both veterans of the Woody Herman & Stan Kenton bands—captures a unique approach to non-traditional musical harmony and an embracing view of world music. I've often wondered if it was also a metaphor for the black and white keys of the piano. I never knew for sure; it was deeper than that. I just loved the mystery of these new sounds.

As a teenager, when I heard Claude play, it was the first time I had encountered these harmonies. They instantly resonated with me, just as they did with many musicians in the Indianapolis area. Claude composed six pieces known as "Zebra I – VI," and John, who learned them all, would sometimes add his own voicings, often laughing at having unraveled another musical riddle. John also created his own compositions using these captivating harmonies, some of which were recorded on his solo piano album, *The Pond*. Claude's solo album, *Every Time We Say Goodbye*, features several of his Zebra works as well.

I was eager to join this "music club" and felt thrilled when invited to be part of John's group, the Baron Von Ohlen Quartet. We recorded 'The Baron' on Stan Kenton's Creative World label. In this ensemble, with John on drums and Mary Ann Moss on vocals, Claude and I blended acoustic piano, Fender Rhodes, keyboard bass, and the Farfisa organ, creating a new hybrid sound. We were fortunate to perform six nights a week for a couple of years.

When John decided to expand this sound into a big band, we added guitar, vibes, voice, and percussion. This new configuration led to the recording of the *Downtown Blues* and *Live* albums. Inspired by our sound, younger musicians like pianist Steve Corn, drummer Greg Corn, bassist Joe Deal, and drummer Mike Mechem formed their own groups embracing this style.

Fast forward several decades, and we continue to celebrate this sound while writing new compositions. With longtime collaborators of the 'AHA Trio', drummer Steve Houghton, (Freddie Hubbard, Woody Herman, Lyle Mays) and bassist Jeremy Allen, (Bob Brookmeyer) we called on vibist, Rusty Burge, Rob Dixon, tenor sax, (Charlie Hunter, Mike Clark), Frank Glover, clarinet and vocalists Erin Benedict and John Brewer to join us in this adventure. On *Zebra Stories* we honor the legacy of this unique musical journey. I am deeply grateful to these wonderfully talented artists for their exceptional contributions to this project.

Last May we recorded two new big band albums that pay tribute to the Indianapolis sound, affectionately known as the 'Naptown Sound' combined with 'Zebra Sound.' Both albums, *Naptown Sound* and *Full Circle*, by the Steve Allee Big Band, are set to be released in the Spring and Fall of 2025.

'*Zebra Stories*' pays tribute to Claude Sifferlen, John Von Ohlen, and Steve Corn. — Steve Allee



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