

Journey to the Heart of Africa
Murphy's *Cool Water* is a genuine jazz revelation

Every recording has something of a story associated with it, especially in jazz. For **Greg Murphy's** victorious new album, the story is especially intriguing and uniquely spiritual.

"The inspiration for the concept of the album and title track, 'Enkare Nairobi,' (which means 'cool water' in Maasai and refers to the Nairobi River which flows through the Kenyan capital) came from a dream," Murphy recalls, "and was a direct connection to my trip to Kenya in March of 2019." Murphy woke up after dreaming a melody and sang it into his phone's recorder and wrote it out that day. Months later, when he was putting the song together, he watched the video he recorded of the Maasai women singing their greeting song when he visited their village.

"When I saw the video," he says, "I realized there was a melodic and rhythmic connection from that music that came to me in my dream." Murphy lowered the key of the song a half-step, added some harmonies and the whole thing came together beautifully.

Murphy spoke with **Neal Weiss** of **Whaling City Sound** about the project to get it off the ground. "I told Neal I wanted an African theme as a central aspect of the record," says Murphy. "And Neal suggested that I incorporate the actual Maasai audio into the song."

Loosely translated as, "Thank you, God, for allowing our visitors to arrive safely," the greeting song and the subsequent title track for his beautiful recording was possible because Murphy had been invited to Nairobi originally by Jon Alpert and Slava Fetisov in coordination with the United Nations Environment Programme to play hockey with the Kenyan Ice Lions in an ongoing effort to promote climate change awareness. "Another coincidence occurred when my wife Nancy and I touched down on the plane in Africa only to find out that our previous release, *Bright Idea* (WCS 111) returned to #1 on the *JazzWeek* charts!"

Cool Water is fascinating beyond its title track and chief inspiration. While "Enkare Nairobi" is the literal and figurative heart of the recording, the rest of the session also soars. The recording opens with the ebullient "Chim Chim Cher-ee," segues into a chancy take on Steely Dan's "Green Earrings," careening through a battery of brisk melodies and beautiful playing, including the astonishing "Cuttin' Trane's Corners," a dark, surprising cover of Wayne Shorter's "Lost," and the funk-filled closing celebration, "You Decide." Murphy's fingers find delicate and exciting ways of expressing themselves across the keys. It is the sound of a blissful talent with a renewed belief in both his life and music. Murphy's bandmates Jeff "Tain" Watts on drums, Eric Wheeler on bass and a bevy of guests also elevate the experience. "I'm so proud of the topflight contributions from all of my friends who made this album possible," says Murphy. "Their

ideas, energy, patience, professionalism, experience, humility, and camaraderie were invaluable.”

Appearances by special guests Kaïssa Doumbe Moulongo and Dave Kikoski also added superb flourishes. “I invited Kaïssa to sing on the session and lend her voice to the title track,” Murphy recalls. “I asked her to translate the greeting song into her native language of Duala, (Cameroon) and sing along with ‘Tain’s’ drum solo towards the end. She added a West African vibe to the song, which connected to the original melody from East Africa.”

Kikoski’s work ethic also inspired Murphy. “When Dave recorded the solos for ‘Green Earrings’ and ‘Friendship,’ if he didn’t nail something on the first take, he’d do multiple takes until he was satisfied, going back and forth to the piano, rewriting the chords so they made more sense to him, etc ... he’s a great friend and a true professional.”

In the end, *Cool Water* is just as its title says: long and fresh, a ride with the top down with a bunch of good friends, rife with optimism and full of freedom and discovery. Greg Murphy is motivated, inspired, ambitious and energized. In reference to his career and musical journey, he says, “Where I’m headed? No limitations, not even the sky.”