

# Leslie Pintchik

## Sophomore Swing... A Conversation with Leslie Pintchik

**Artist Interview by:** [Kevin Cox](#)

March 2008 - Pianist/composer Leslie Pintchik's new CD, *Quartets*, follows the success of her delectable 2004 debut, *So Glad To Be Here*. *Quartets* actually features two different quartets, the core of each being Pintchik's working trio – Pintchik on Piano, Scott Hardy on Bass, and Mark Hodge on drums. Percussionist Satoshi Takeishi and saxophonist Steve Wilson round out the two quartets. We caught up with Leslie recently, and she was happy to discuss her new CD and more.



**JazzReview:** How would you compare the experience of recording *Quartets* to the experience of recording your debut, *So Glad To Be Here*?

**Leslie Pintchik:** Both recording sessions were very rewarding experiences, thanks in large part to the wonderful support and enthusiasm from my fellow band-members, as well as our engineer.

On *So Glad To Be Here*, all the music was played by the same trio, while the music on *Quartets* was performed by two different quartets. That said, the material on both recordings featured a wide range of feeling, so the musical challenge of capturing different moods remained the same for both CDs.

However, there was one big logistical difference. *So Glad To Be Here* was recorded in Connecticut at the recording studio of my record label (Ambient). The long commute probably took its toll on our trio (based in Manhattan and Brooklyn), especially the night we drove home in a severe rainstorm. *Quartets* was recorded in Manhattan, so I experienced the short subway commute as a wonderfully convenient pleasure (which I imagine is not something the MTA hears too often from its chronically rushed passengers!).

**JazzReview:** Did you feel pressure to match, if not exceed, the success of your critically acclaimed first CD?

**Leslie Pintchik:** I didn't feel particularly pressured "to match, if not exceed" the first CD, but I always do feel pressured to come up with something that I feel passes muster, that is, to create music that speaks directly to people.

**JazzReview:** In the years between *So Glad To Be Here* and *Quartets*, where do you feel you have experienced the most growth – as a musician, or as a composer/arranger?

**Leslie Pintchik:** Although I hope I've grown in both areas, I've probably experienced more growth in the last three years as a player than as a composer/arranger.

**JazzReview:** *Quartets* features two distinct quartets. Was it your original intention to record a CD with two different quartets?

**Leslie Pintchik:** Originally, I planned to record with three different groups: a trio, a quartet with percussionist Satoshi Takeishi, and a quartet with saxophonist Steve Wilson. Shortly into the session, I decided to include Satoshi on the trio numbers, so in the end, we ended up with the two quartets.

I chose to work with two different quartets primarily because of the material. As I mentioned in the liner notes to the CD, the quartet which included percussionist Satoshi Takeishi is more like a trio with percussion. Satoshi gave the music an orchestral quality, and deepened it with the balanced asymmetry of his colors and rhythm.

The other quartet (which featured saxophonist Steve Wilson) has the strengths of a more traditional jazz quartet; the material (all original tunes) seemed a great fit for Steve's (as well as the group's) beautiful swing feeling, Latin grooves, and ballad playing.

**JazzReview:** Availability issues aside, do you prefer to play in a quartet or a trio?

**Leslie Pintchik:** I'm not sure I can answer that one. I play the majority of my gigs with my working trio (myself on piano, Scott Hardy on bass, and Mark Dodge on drums), and I love that configuration. But percussionist Satoshi Takeishi adds such beautiful colors and depth, and it's also always a real privilege to play with saxophonist Steve Wilson.

**JazzReview:** Let's talk about the three standards you chose to include on *Quartets*, and their very distinctive arrangements. The usually upbeat number "Happy Days Are Here Again," for example, is presented as a much slower, contemplative piece with, I think, a touch of irony.

**Leslie Pintchik:** I chose these standards ("Happy Days Are Here Again," "Too Close For Comfort," and "Somewhere") because all three inspired me emotionally, and I was able to do something quite different with them, while (hopefully) remaining true to the tunes.

To my ears, the group's performance of "Happy Days Are Here Again" conjures a complexity of feeling. The slow tempo (with a rolling triplet feel), some unusual darker harmonies, and the extraordinary responsiveness of the musicians to each other help to give the tune its unusual flavor.

On "Too Close For Comfort," it was a lot of fun to revamp a very familiar swing tune into two contrasting Brazilian rhythms (especially the way the melody in the "A" section interacts with the partido alto groove). And as a listener, I especially enjoyed the drum/percussion "duel" with Takeishi on cajon, an instrument not usually used in a Brazilian setting.

*Somewhere* features a subtle dancing Brazilian groove that percolates just below the surface of a ballad feel. The opening vamp is based on the last two notes of the bridge, and is also used as the basis for improvisation in the middle of the track. The sense of longing in Leonard Bernstein's very beautiful melody is similar in feeling to its original setting in "West Side Story," although there is a complete change of feeling with a surprise ending that references the hook from Baden Powell's "Berimbau."

**JazzReview:** Do you have a favorite track on this disc?

**Leslie Pintchik:** I like different tracks for different reasons. For group interplay, I would choose *Happy Days Are Here Again*, and for group groove and time feel, "Too Close For Comfort," and my favorite solo on the CD is Steve Wilson's ravishing performance on the ballad "Private Moment."

**JazzReview:** Listening to you now, I find it incredible (and inspirational) that you didn't begin playing piano until college. Did you study piano at all as a child?

**Leslie Pintchik:** Unfortunately, probably my only rebellion as a child was to refuse the piano lessons that were always generously offered by my music-loving father. I did take a few lessons as a child, but I begged to quit (!?), and that was that. I dabbled a bit with the piano as an undergraduate, and also in graduate school, but I didn't get serious about music until I left graduate school. (I was never a good multi-tasker nor a quick study).

Although I sometimes regret my late start in music, I'm not sorry that I've spent a good part of my life in literature; I imagine it's bound to inform my musical voice in ways I couldn't articulate.

**JazzReview:** In addition to composing and performing wonderful jazz music, you have done some writing about jazz. Tell us about how Leslie the musician and Leslie the writer/critic help or hinder each other's creativity.

**Leslie Pintchik:** Since my relatively late start in music, composing and playing music has taken up most of my time, so I've written very little up to this point. But I would still like to find the time to write. I don't see it as either helping or hindering my musical creativity, but rather as just another form of expression, one that comes from the same source as the music.

**JazzReview:** Who are you listening to these days?

**Leslie Pintchik:** For their fearlessness, Miles Davis, comedian Robin Williams, Bjork. I also love Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock, classical pianist Richard Goode, Bill Evans, Thelonious Monk, Wayne Shorter, Stan Getz, and the Brazilian singers and composers Rosa Passos, Leila Pinheiro, Joao Gilberto and Jobim.

**For more information:** [www.lesliepintchik.com](http://www.lesliepintchik.com)