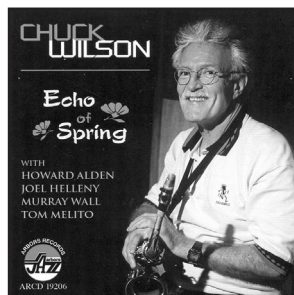


I'll Remember Django
Howard Alden
(Arbors)



Echo of Spring
Chuck Wilson
(Arbors)

by Graham Flanagan

Howard Alden continues his reign as the premier player of the 'traditional' jazz guitar with two new recordings made for the Arbors label. Alden's notoriety multiplied tenfold when, in 1999, Woody Allen hired him as a musical stand-in for Sean Penn in the Depression-era jazz comedy *Sweet and Lowdown*.

Of course you can't think of *Sweet and Lowdown* without thinking of Django Reinhardt, whose style permeates throughout the movie. Therefore, it's no surprise that Alden continues to honor the legacy of that legendary "gypsy from France". Alden's new album *I'll Remember Django* combines songs made popular by the legend (who was actually born in Belgium) with other tunes that capture the enduring spirit of his music. Joining Alden on the date are rhythm guitarist Matt Munisteri and bassist Jon Burr, as well as featured players Warren Vaché on trumpet and Anat Cohen doubling on soprano sax and clarinet.

Cohen and Alden frequently perform together live and their obvious familiarity definitely enhances the music heard here. This becomes immediately evident on the title track, which allows the two musicians to perform a thoughtful duet with some nice accents from Burr. Vaché gets a hearty showcase on the group's knockout rendition of the Paul Misraki-penned ballad "Insensiblement", a tune that Reinhardt recorded in his heyday. Vaché's lyrically soulful soloing, along with solid accompaniment from the rest of the band, makes this one of the album's standout tracks. Alden and company bring up the energy on the uptempo reading of Duke Ellington's "Jubilee Stomp", which features compelling work from Cohen on soprano sax. Her skills at fast-paced syncopation obviously inspire the leader; this track may be the best example of Alden's ability to recreate Reinhardt's uncanny nimbleness on his custom-made seven-string. But the album's true centerpiece may be the combo of "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles" and "I'll See You in My Dreams" - the one-two musical punch that punctuates *Sweet and Lowdown*.

Alden takes on the role of supporting character on the Chuck Wilson-led *Echo of Spring*. The veteran leader switches between alto sax and clarinet for this eclectic straightahead date, which - along with Alden on guitar - features the late Joel Helleny on trombone and rhythm section comprised of bassist Murray Wall and Tom Melito on the skins.

The group tackles a diverse setlist featuring somewhat obscure tunes from a laundry list of jazz history's heavy hitters like Tadd Dameron, Lee Morgan, Ornette Coleman and Duke Ellington/Billy Strayhorn. The 12-track album offers 72 minutes of stellar jazz, making it hard to pick a lone standout but it just might be the group's winning midtempo crack at Dameron's "On a Misty Night". The title track also shines, featuring the leader's clarinet skills and also a guest appearance by Diva Goodfriend-Koven on alto flute. You need look no further than this Wilson date to find one of the best straightahead releases of the year. The group maintains an easygoing, swinging sensibility, making *Echo of Spring* a definite must-listen.

Alden's reputation as the best in the business receives further credibility from these two dates, both of which should motivate the listener to catch him live

in New York City.

For more information, visit arborsrecords.com. Alden is at Metropolitan Room Oct. 10th with Kelly Suttentfield, Bar Next Door Oct. 20th and Joe G's Wednesdays. See Calendar and Regular Engagements.



Tenderly (Solo Guitar Concert)
Kenny Burrell (HighNote)
Plectrum Jazz Guitar Solos Frank Portolese (s/r)
What's It All About Pat Metheny (Nonesuch)
by Anders Griffen

In modern times we have solo jazz performers on just about every instrument. One reason Coleman Hawkins is remembered as an innovator is for recording saxophone solos early on. Piano and guitar would seem more obvious choices for solo performances since they more distinctly produce simultaneous melody and harmony. However, in the jazz idiom, perhaps not as many solo guitarists have come forward as one might expect. Joe Pass is probably the first that comes to mind. Here we have three more welcome entries to the canon with new recordings from Kenny Burrell, Frank Portolese and Pat Metheny.

Kenny Burrell's *Tenderly* was recorded in concert and displays a relaxed balance between sensibility and whimsy. The listener experiences both within the first ten seconds of "Autumn Leaves" and during an inspired treatment of the title track. Burrell's "Billie Holiday Tribute Medley" and "Ellingtonia Montage" are likewise inspired and personal. The arrangements and spontaneous modulations bring freshness to this set of mostly standards. It also sounds like a cleanly amplified guitar tone. You really get the sound of Burrell's fingers on one of four instruments he employed for these performances. Generally playing with a pick and alternating between bass notes, chordal melodies and single-note lines, a master tells his story within each of these works.

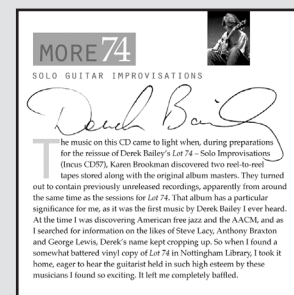
The title *Plectrum Jazz Guitar Solos* by Frank Portolese is apt because he employs the plectrum, or guitar pick, whereas solo guitar music has traditionally produced polyphony by using all fingers of the plucking hand. So while counterpoint may be implied here it is not explicit. Portolese is a fluent guitarist who also prefers a clean tone. He 'shreds' right from the opening of "Over the Rainbow" and divides rapid-fire lines with chordal melodies. "As Time Goes By" gets a creative introduction and expanded harmony, "Topsy" skips at a fun pace and "Black and Tan Fantasy" evokes all the mystery that comes with another time and place. The arrangements of these standards are inventive and the performances at times beautiful as Portolese showcases an abundance of technique.

Any critique of Pat Metheny's work comes with an inherent challenge: as he is an accomplished artist of highly advanced skill, one must defer somewhat to his authority. Some listeners may argue that *What's It All About* is not a jazz record. The program is made up of songs that Metheny probably heard growing up, popular songs by the likes of Paul Simon, Carly Simon, John Lennon & Paul McCartney and others, and rendered not necessarily in a jazz style. However, the sound and the performance are so beautiful it doesn't matter what you call it. Except for the strong current on "Pipeline", this is a fairly mellow album, though

never lacking vitality. One forgets that this is a solo performance. "The Sound of Silence" is otherworldly on the harp-like 42-string guitar, but most of the set is played on a baritone guitar, the deeper bottom end of which helps fill out the aural picture. Metheny has almost always used some kind of sound processing; it's easily noticed here but not overbearing. The arrangements flow so naturally the listener is never reminded of technique except to admire Metheny's fine playing.

For more information, visit jazzdepot.com, frankportolese.com and nonesuch.com. Metheny is at Blue Note Oct. 11th-16th in duo with Larry Grenadier. See Calendar.

UNEARTHED GEM



More 74 (Solo Guitar Improvisations)
Derek Bailey (Incus)
by Robert Iannapolo

There's always been a bit of ambivalence directed toward the late guitarist Derek Bailey. Sure, plenty of free jazz lovers appreciated his music, yet a sizeable portion of them were less than enamored of the admittedly difficult style he developed on the instrument. He could be confoundedly quiet when others were raging around him. Discontinuity ruled his improvisational roost.

Yet, even though he studiously avoided repetition, his style/music possessed an almost Zen-like quality. When one listens to Bailey deeply, despite the lack of a focus for the listener, there is a hypnotic quality found in the best trance-inducing music. But at the same time, Bailey had a tendency to leaven his music with a bit of earthly humor. There's a lot to deal with when listening to Bailey.

Lot 74 is one of the classic Derek Bailey solo albums from the '70s and it was reissued on CD back in 2009. Although he had a multitude of collaborators, Bailey's solo albums were the best way to hear his original mind at work. He was constantly honing his craft and by the time of *Lot 74* he was playing stereo electric guitar with twin volume pedals that created some remarkable effects.

More 74 stems from the discovery of a tape box labeled "elec rec. MAR/74". While not technically outtakes from *Lot 74*, this is clearly music cut from the same cloth. The music sparks off in all directions with Bailey barely able to contain himself. Of the 13 tracks, 10 are played on electric guitar and the last three are performed on "19-string (approx) acoustic guitar". While there's nothing here as epic and satisfying as the side-long title track of *Lot 74*, the music still moves in typical Bailey fashion, in digestible doses. For those who prefer lengthier ruminations, "Probably Pt. 3" is 14 minutes and "Catford Pt. 2" nearly ten minutes. Bailey's humor is best heard on "I Remember The Early Seventies", where he reminisces on days gone by. It's almost as if he's parodying the instant nostalgia so prevalent today. It's also as close to a Bailey alternate take as we'll probably ever get, being a reworking of *Lot 74*'s "Inside Joke". *More 74* is a worthy archival release and a good window into Bailey's world.

For more information, visit incusrecords.force9.co.uk