

Tomas Janzon

COAST TO COAST TO COAST. Changes Music, Los Angeles, California, 2006. *Urgency, Sanding, The Croak, Wescology, Diminued, Four AM, The Hearness, The Blue Jay, The Day Before, A Week from Now.*

PERSONNEL: Tomas Janzon, guitar; William Henderson, piano; Tony Austin, Ben Dixon, Ali Djeridi, drums; Jeff Littleton, Ken Filiano, Lars Ekman, bass; Birger Thorelli, marimba.

By Bob Gish

All compositions in *Coast to Coast to Coast* are by Tomas Janzon, composer and guitarist extraordinaire! On this project he covers the moods and modalities of not just the three coasts of the United States. . . qualifying him as a transcontinental guitarist. . . he enlivens his ideas and his playing with global sensibility and intensity. Insofar as this is so, one needn't worry about the typologies and genres of the ten tunes recorded here. Janzon, in short, contains multitudes in conception and execution of his music.

Whether viewed as jazz, fusion, or "world" music, here are some transcendent tunes: for the here and now, the where and the when, the then and there, the inside and outside. The presence of Birger Thorelli's marimba adds to the beyond-bounds nature of most of the tunes, plus, of course, the rather "wet" tones of Janzon's guitar with just the right smidgen of reverb and distortion, treble and bass.

Modality changes into swing and back again, as in, especially "Wescology" where the strains of the inimitable Wes Montgomery take over from likes of Abercrombie and Scofield. In this track, Janzon's way with effects and looping reinforce the textures present in the tune, whether through allusion to another artist or line.

"Diminued," far from diminishing anything, other than a scale or two, continues the tradition of fine piano and guitar collaboration, with Janzon soloing and comping his way in and out of unison and into and beyond the vibrations and tensions of tremolo. "Four AM" evidences a shift in guitar from steel string to nylon with a mood shift in keeping with the late-night/early-morning rhythms of that ambiguous time. Here too the ending of the song affords an ideal cap to the mellifluous proceedings.

In "Urgency," "Sanding," and "The Hearness," Janzon displays his adroit adaptation of scales and chromaticism to lyricism. At once similar-sounding and unique, each of these tunes (and the entire CD) never lapses into redundancy, each offering a fresh start, a deft progres-

sion through the various realms and capabilities of the guitar always eschewing pure guitaristics for their own sake. The music not the instrument remains the end.

The "Blue Jay" is a memorable example of melody - dramatizing the egalitarian nature of "birdness," be it squawker or crooner, proving yet again the role of bard as bird. "The Day Before" is a bluesy version in more upbeat reverse, presumably, of the morning after. "A Week from Now" slows things down considerably and the CD ends on a more contemplative, melancholy mood with none of the anxious urgency of "Urgency."

Jim Hall, who knows as much about the guitar as anyone, is known for the thought he gives to any set or play list, knowing that sequence and theme also communicate a message. So it is too with Janzon who not only composed the tunes here but also composes the total experience of the CD. Just the right progression of themes and tempos, just the right variety of long running times with short, just the right instrumentation for any given tune, hitting, as the CD title metaphorically suggests, all the points of the compass, all the coasts and all the landforms between. It's a tour designed for listening and savoring. If only all such recording projects were so considerate, so admirable.



David Joel

SPIRAL SKY—Turning Point Productions 08275-1. www.davidjoel.net. *The Dance Of Life; Eastern Truth; Western Lies; As It May End; The Star-Spangled Gospel; Spiral Sky; Little Bear Prelude; Little Bear; Other Side Of The Sun.*

PERSONNEL: David Joel, guitars; John Stenger, keyboards; Paul Gehman, bass; Dan Monaghan, drums.

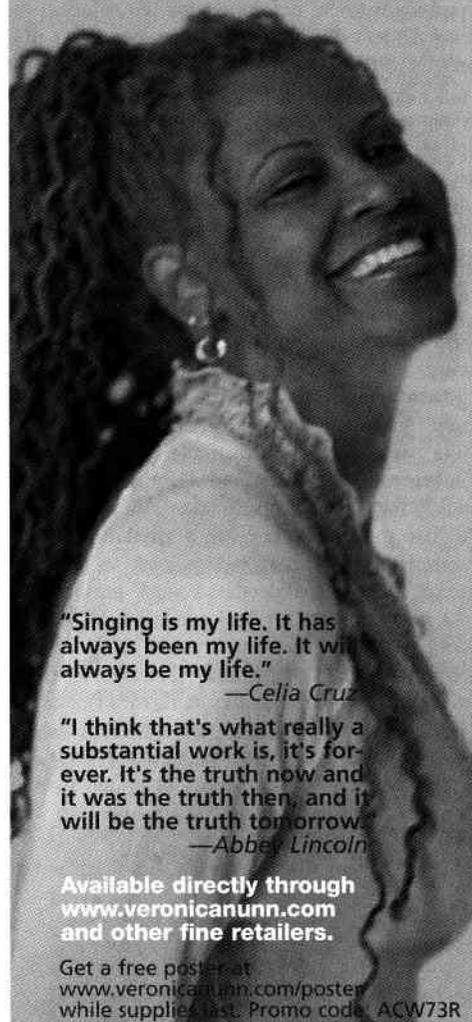
By Dan Bilawsky

Spiral Sky, the first studio recording from guitarist David Joel, exhibits a positive, uplifting musical spirit and a pleasant atmosphere throughout the nine original compositions from him. The album opener, "The Dance Of Life," is an upbeat piece that features some great solo work from Joel and some nice piano and keyboard work from John Stenger. Dan Monaghan's drumming has a samba-influenced groove and he breaks things up and helps to accentuate the different rhythmic directions and ideas coming from the other members of the quartet. "Eastern Truth" begins with a brief introduction that uses sounds that point toward

Old school has a new voice.



with:
Travis Shook Piano
Jennifer Vincent Bass
Jaz Sawyer Drums, Percussion



"Singing is my life. It has always been my life. It will always be my life."

—Celia Cruz

"I think that's what really a substantial work is, it's forever. It's the truth now and it was the truth then, and it will be the truth tomorrow."

—Abbey Lincoln

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music from Asia. The gong sounds, dark sounding strings and wooden flute sounds, presumably done on a keyboard by Stenger, seem a bit much at the top, but things begin to move into a strong swing vein soon after. Paul Gehman's bass combined with Monaghan's drumming create a great swing groove for Joel and Stenger to ride over. While some of Stenger's keyboard effects, like the phasing effect around the five minute mark, can be a bit distracting, he more than makes up for it with some solid soloing later in the song. Gehman's solo proves to be the highlight of this track and his pacing is superb. "Western Lies" is a catchy song in five that features some outstanding drum work from Monaghan. Joel creates a vamp that begins to sound more and more sinister as time passes and the sound thickens. While this is occurring, Monaghan solos with great creativity and his build in intensity matches that of the leader. The tension breaks and Stenger takes over. Gehman's solo on this track is much more rhythmically driven than his solo from the previous song. While Joel's direction is unclear as his solo begins here, he proves to have great logic as the tension mounts and he unleashes some fiery guitar work toward the end of the track.

"As It May End" is a slow and expressive piece of music that allows the quartet to show off their mellower side. Joel's guitar playing and Stenger's keyboard work control the flow of the music, while Monaghan and Gehman provide musical coloration for the soloists. Joel and the rest of his musical comrades move in an edgier direction with "The Star-Spangled Gospel." Joel's playing is raw and exciting, as Gehman and Monaghan lay down a simple, yet completely effective, blues groove. Stenger's organ sounds in the background are a perfect match to Joel's powerful, emotion-drenched blues. The title track has the most overt fusion influences of any track on the album. Gehman and Monaghan, and Joel and Stenger to a lesser extent, unleash some previously hidden chops on this track and show a real affinity for music in this stylistic vein. "Little Bear Prelude" is a beautiful piece of guitar music that features Joel's pretty single note lines. "Little Bear" is an attractive ballad-like piece that has a distinct R&B and Gospel influence. Monaghan and Gehman show that, while they have chops to spare, they don't have to use them and they are a rhythm team that completely understands how best to serve the song. Stenger's understated work provides just the right support for Joel and his solo sits well within the structure and style of the song. The album closer, "Other Side Of The Sun," starts on a mellower note with the band in an open and vast musical realm and then a firmer swing sound, lead by Gehman's walking bass line, takes over. While the energy ebbs and flows at various points of the track, things heat up when Joel's playing gets some fire behind it and, later, when Monaghan's drumming heats up toward the end of the song. *Spiral Sky* proves to be a diverse program of well-crafted and finely performed original music from guitarist David Joel.



Mike Kennedy

IDLE AFTERNOON —

www.kennedymusic.com. *I'll Take Two; Walk In The Park; Idle Afternoon; Gilded Garden; Territory; News To Me; Pale Flying Feet; Days End.*

PERSONNEL: Mike Kennedy, guitar; Mike Frank, piano; Paul Gehman, bass; Dan Monaghan.

By Dan Bilawsky

There is something to be said for an album, or artist, that doesn't rely on a musical gimmick, massive mountains of effects, or the insertion of a "name" guest artist as a means or a ploy for gaining attention. Guitarist Mike Kennedy has created a program of eight originals, put together a quartet of strong players, and created an album, *Idle Afternoon*, that succeeds on its own merits and relies on none of the aforementioned crutches. The album opener is an up-tempo, though unhurried, piece titled "I'll Take Two." Kennedy takes the first solo on the piece, followed by pianist Mike Frank and bassist Paul Gehman with some solo space of their own. Dan Monaghan, who makes such a smooth segue between sticks and brushes that you barely notice the change, gets to show off his technique and tasteful touch when he trades eight measure solos toward the end of this song. "Walk In The Park" is gentle and gloriously mellow, as one might expect from the title, and Gehman's walking bass line locks in the groove as Frank and, then, Kennedy solo over it. Gehman gets a chance to solo here and Monaghan and Frank provide some incredibly sensitive accompaniment during this section of the piece. The funky bass and drum work on "Idle Afternoon" hearken back to classic Blue Note tracks like "The Sidewinder" and "The Turnaround," with a slightly mellower vibe attached to the music. Kennedy solos first and Frank follows with a terrific solo that stretches and fragments the rhythmic structure of the song. "Gilded Garden" is a lightly floating tune in three (or 6/8 depending on how you hear it) and Frank and Kennedy share the solo spotlight again.

While "Territory" doesn't necessarily have a strong melodic hook to draw in the listener, it does feature some nice soloing from Kennedy, Frank and Gehman. "News To Me," the longest track on the album, features the best example of group interaction. While Kennedy is clearly in charge from the outset, Monaghan is right there with him to paint percussive textures into the canvas of the music, while Frank's understated comping is perfect in this setting. Geh-

man knows how to move with, and around, everything going on, while also contributing to the overall quality of the music. This piece presents the most spacious music on the album. Monaghan brings lots of energy to "Pale Flying Feet" with his crisp, swinging drums and the band responds well to his driving drumming. Following a strong bass solo from Gehman, Monaghan, now using brushes, turns in an impressive solo to end the track. "Days End," the final track on the album, is a beautiful guitar piece that shows off a completely different side of Kennedy's playing. This quiet, reflective composition makes for the perfect conclusion for *Idle Afternoon*.



B.D. Lenz

STRAIGHT UP—Apria Records.

www.apriarecords.com. *Uh-Huh; Straight Up; I Take Refuge in U; Joe Citizen; Love, As A Flower Blossoms; 3+5=Blue; Bridges; Quiet Desperation; Here and Now; It's The Way of the World' Us and Them.*

PERSONNEL: B.D. Lenz, electric and acoustic Guitars; Joe Ashlar, piano and Keys; James Rosocha, electric bass and Dave Edwards upright bass; Tom Cottone and Karl Latham, drums; Geoff Mattoon, sax.

By Bob Gish

Here's a hard driving, straight away, and, yes, straight up assembly of tunes for the most part (with the exception of "Us and Them") written and arranged by guitarist B.D. Lenz that fuses rock and funk and smooth jazz in, ironically, the purest of ways. "Bridges," for example, is a cut representative of just how alluring, accommodating, and restorative fusion, when done masterfully, can be.

The title tune is a modal musing featuring Lenz's beautifully sustained, far ranging guitaristics along with James Rosocha's funkadelic electric bass against Joe Ashlar's pylon-like keyboard chording and Tom Cotton's solid back beat drumming. It's indicative of the tight togetherness of the group - all of whom are very much at home with Lenz's concepts and his oh so facile execution of them. "It's The Way of the World," later in the play list, is another modal track with near heavenly hypnotic power.

This is an offering which deserves not just attention but accolades by Beyond Jazz and Chill fans everywhere. There's a soft, smooth spot or two as well - to wit "Love, As A Flower Blossoms," a poignant testimonial to the romantic resonance of the acoustic guitar played against sparse yet mellifluous piano and key-board