

Don't Forget Your Guitar
Guitar Talk, Vol. 2: Jazz Duos/Classical Duos
 Joel Harrison (AGS Recordings)
 by Fred Bouchard

Restless guitar polymath Joel Harrison spans a career of constant surprise: he owns a large collection (and virtuoso technical command) of guitars, writes books on and teaches guitar history, composes bold, keening music in myriad styles and maintains a comprehensive website, as well as producing the annual Alt Guitar Summit (AGS) summer camp and annual festival plus concert presentations throughout the year. Among 25 leader dates he's unboxed: *Range Of Motion*, a joyous, multi-kulti 1997 jam band featuring double-reeders Paul McCandless and Paul Hanson; 2006's *Harbor*, which explores twangy, fleet tunes—with guitarist foil Nguyễn Lê—adrip with warm sustains and soaring, complex lines; and 2010's *String Choir* with guitarist Liberty Ellman and a string quartet playing haunting settings of drummer Paul Motian's exquisite melodies. In 2011, Harrison earned a Guggenheim Fellowship and founded AGS, arguably the premier organization to present, educate, record and foster a genial wide-ranging forward-looking plectrists' collective.

He avows that guitar duos are his "favorite means of musical transportation," and during the COVID-19 pandemic he pursued shelved projects to write through-composed classical and semi-free jazz pieces,

here performed on three CDs by AGS' companionable brotherhood. As guitar guru, writer and critic Bill Milkowski noted on *Harbor*, Harrison "cut[s] a wide stylistic swath...with heightened modal excursions, bits of swirling psychedelia, touches of funk, chamber-like delicacy, and full throttle electronic skronking."

Joel Harrison & AGS' *Don't Forget Your Guitar* recaps such styles in ten vivid, if largely contemplative duets comp-rovised by guitarists and AGS members. Notable are several. Bill Frisell and Emmanuel Michael gamely reinvent The Beatles' "In My Life"—and find a poignant coda. David Gilmore and Cecil Alexander uncork a bubbly "Libreville". Wolfgang Muthspiel and Gilad Hekselman fold into Kurt Weill's lively "Liebeslied" with extra whipped cream. Wendy Eisenberg and Anthony Pirog prod us to a fuzzy abyss. Grant Gordy and Ben Garnett follow a hayseed blues with a certain call of Carla Bley's "Lawns", a verdant vista nicknamed for pianist Larry Willis.

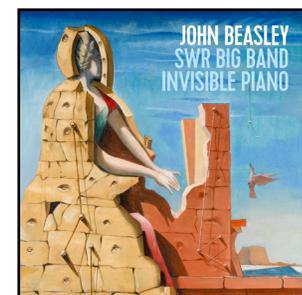
Guitar Talk, Vol. 2 (Jazz Duos/Classical Duos) unveils Harrison's composed classical duets, compatibly interpreted by Fareed Haque and Dan Lippel, which whimsically hew declamatory ("Pegasus") or sinewy (Lippel's solo "Boston, 1977"), employ Indian raga harmonies (hear Haque's improv on "Evening in Udaipur"), echo Tarrega's Alhambra tremolo (memorial to a dear cousin) and bubble with appealing melody ("Winter Solstice", "January"). His dozen jazz duos were arranged on-the-spot with Muthspiel, Pirog, Nels Cline, Gregg Belisle-Chi (two each), singing Camila Meza, Alan Levy, Brad Shepik and—with Mike Stern—a sly, cozy "D.C.". Harrison's duos with Cline (colleagues for 50-years!) clang and churn with brash overtones. Bookenders with Belisle-Chi go from acrid nailbiter to breathe-easy blues. To Muthspiel's pearly wisdom, Harrison gently defers in Bley tribute and tactile "Snow on Ash". Pirog and he tackle both pain and wry whimsy. Enough: go listen!

For more info visit joelharrison.com and alternativeguitarsummit.com. Harrison is at *The Local* (Saugerties, NY) Apr. 19 (with *The Guitar Choir*). See *100 Miles Out*.

Johnson. Nicolas keeps up well with Magnarelli's speedy delivery atop Manasia's chromatic comping, while Davis' "Decidedly So" softly swings with the horns' lovely tandem pronouncements. A few of the album's nine selections seem to reflect the leader's thoughts during what must have been an uncertain time: the jovial, hopeful "Good Health", "When I Fall in Love" and "10th Anniversary". On the latter selection and "When" (a cover of trumpeter Blue Mitchell's version), where Magnarelli's dulcet crooning is paired with Davis' winsome additions, Manasia's lyrical asides enhance the sentiment as the rhythm section suitably supports. Richard Rodgers' "This Nearly Was Mine" is a bouncy treat, with dancing flugelhorn notes adorning the trombonist's deliciously droll accompaniment, as well as Manasia's lyrical solo, Nicolas' sturdy swing and Green's animated rhythmic contributions. Sigmund Romberg's "When I Grow Too Old to Dream" is given its own uplifting, hard-bop treatment, with the pianist's inner Bud Powell deftly leading the way to a tag team performance by the horn players. The closer, "Jimmy's Blues", a tribute to Magnarelli's brother, is a bop swinger, with the horns displaying their kinship to duos such as Lee Morgan and Curtis Fuller.

Following last year's stellar quartet album release, *Concord* (SteepleChase), *Decidedly So* reveals that Joe Magnarelli shows no signs of slipping from his position as one of our premier trumpeters and purveyors of modern jazz. This new release testifies to his fidelity with other equally-skilled musicians who share both his artistry and vision.

For more info visit cellarlive.bandcamp.com. Magnarelli is at *Jazzcultural* Apr. 8 (part of "Akiko's Organ Nights") and Apr. 30 (as leader). See *Calendar*.



Invisible Piano
 John Beasley/SWR Big Band (o-tone music)
 by George Kanzler



Decidedly So
 Joe Magnarelli (Cellar Music)
 by Jeff Cebulski

Two complementary agents converged during the recording of trumpeter Joe ("Mags") Magnarelli's new quintet album *Decidedly So*, one very personal: the celebration of his marriage to the gifted organist Akiko Tsuruga (who passed away six months after these sessions, following a bout with cancer); the other serendipitous: an unplanned but welcomed audience of 35 fans who accompanied Cellar Music owner Cory Weeds on his annual "New York With Weeds" tour, including for these performances. The musicians—Steve Davis (trombone), Jeremy Manasia (piano), Clovis Nicolas (bass) and Rodney Green (drums)—were clearly inspired by their presence, as is testified by the results.

Mags himself has arguably never sounded better. Kudos to Maureen Sickler, whose sound engineering in the Van Gelder Studio brings a sheen to the trumpeter's expression and provides ample sonic touches to Shawn Pierce's mix. Album opener, "D.J." is a driving tribute to former NBA star, the Boston Celtics guard Dennis

Terence Blanchard's liner notes for *Invisible Piano* provocatively tells us it "isn't just an album. It's a journey into the unknown—where improvisation meets innovation, and where technology becomes a true partner in creation." That technology is primarily the Steinway Spiro, a player piano that can enhance and expand on what is played on it—and presumably create harmonized figures and melodic lines for the sections of the big band from the pianist's improvisations. But the notes, both Blanchard's and the other material accompanying the album, don't ever seem to explain/reveal how this musical alchemy takes place. Yet since we can hear it, it definitely does. The title track comes from a Max Ernst painting that inspired pianist John Beasley in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart Museum. It is one of five of his original compositions named after paintings in the museum, which all began as piano improvisations on the Spiro, and which presumably then created passages for the big band. The music unfurls under, around and in between Beasley's piano passages, which define the shape and melodies of each piece.

The SWR Big Band is brass-centric. Eleven of the sixteen horns are brass, from trumpets through trombones and French horns down to tuba; while there are only five woodwinds, the emphasis is on flutes and clarinets rather than saxophones. So the sonic colors