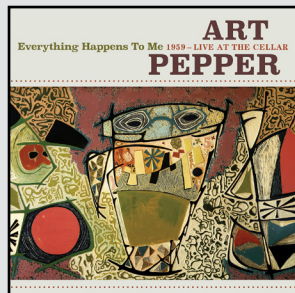


BOXED SET



Everything Happens To Me: 1959 - Live at The Cellar
Art Pepper (Widow's Taste Music/Omnivore)
 by Scott Yanow

It would not be an understatement to say that Art Pepper (1925-1982)—whose 44-year deathaversary is Jun. 15—had a difficult life. And, although some might think this is debatable, it would also not be an understatement to say that he was a musical genius. Consider that, despite his life being erratic, dramatic, and at times quite dangerous, no matter what desperate shape he might have been in at the time (unlike his contemporary, the equally-plagued Chet Baker), Pepper never made a recording that was less than extremely good. Musically, the alto saxophonist did not have an off period except when he was absent from the scene altogether.

One of the few young altoists of the '50s (along with Lee Konitz and Paul Desmond) who did not sound as if he was a close relative of Charlie Parker, Pepper was as influenced by Lester Young and Benny Carter as he was by Bird. From the start, when he was a member of Stan Kenton's band, Pepper had his own sound. Unfortunately, he became a heroin addict early on, and even when making his classic recordings of the '50s, he was scuffling. Jail sentences resulted in several

periods off the scene, and other than some brief returns (including a stint with Buddy Rich's big band), he was largely absent during 1962-72. That all changed in the mid '70s when, with the inspiration of his wife, Laurie Pepper, he made an unlikely comeback that found him playing consistently brilliant music, particularly during his final seven years.

There have been many posthumous releases of his previously unissued concert performances, particularly by Laurie Pepper's Widow's Taste Music label. While most are from his later period, this four-CD set, *Everything Happens To Me*, is taken from a ten-day stint at The Cellar in Vancouver, British Columbia that took place in September 1959. Earlier that year, Pepper had recorded as a sideman with Marty Paich, Dave Pell, Jack Sheldon, Herb Ellis, Barney Kessel, Anita O'Day and Mel Torme, in addition to leading the classic *Art Pepper + Eleven*, which showcased him with Paich's arrangements. Despite the activity, as related in the liner notes, outside of the recording studios the 34-year-old Pepper had been struggling in the Los Angeles area, playing tenor in a rock and roll band and even gigging with a country music group.

None of that is apparent during the 30 songs released for the first time here. Pepper is teamed with an excellent, if obscure, local rhythm section comprised of Chris Gage (piano), Tony Clitheroe (bass) and George Ursan (drums). Gage worked with veteran Canadian tenor-saxophonist Fraser McPherson and trombonist Dave Robbins, led one date of his own, and is on part of an album with trombonist J.J. Johnson. Clitheroe and Ursan, both of whom had not previously recorded, would enjoy similar musical experiences, working with McPherson and top Canadian players. Ursan is on an album with trombonists Frank Rosolino and Carl Fontana, and sets headed by George Robert and

P.J. Perry. During their engagement with Pepper, Gage has occasional solos, Ursan gets a few tradeoffs, and the rhythm section gives the altoist the solid foundation that he needed to be comfortable and sound in top form. While switching to tenor for a few numbers, Pepper is mostly heard on his primary alto instrument, on which he plays at his bebop best. Although six of the 30 performances are incomplete, all but the very brief opener "When You're Smiling" are close to complete, with fadeouts taking place near their conclusions. The recording quality is surprisingly quite good, particularly for previously unreleased live performances from almost 65+ years ago—and the sidemen sound inspired by their meeting with musical greatness.

These recordings are Pepper during his first prime period, before he was influenced by John Coltrane, suffered through his longest jail sentences and started really stretching himself emotionally in his playing. Other than his medium-tempo blues "Holiday Flight", which is heard in three versions, and a rendition of "Brown Gold" (based on "I Got Rhythm"), all of the songs are standards. Among the highlights are a surprisingly rapid rendition of "I Surrender Dear", two heartfelt renditions of "Over the Rainbow" and romps through such songs as "(Back Home Again in) Indiana", "Yardbird Suite", "Allen's Alley" and "Strike Up the Band". Although some of the tunes are heard two or three times, needless to say the solos never repeat themselves. Pepper is the dominant voice throughout, really digging into the music, swinging hard and creating an endless flow of inventive ideas within the bebop tradition. If he had faded out altogether in the '60s and not made his comeback, he would still be recognized as one of the greats.

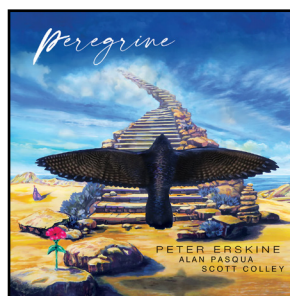
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Scofield's tasteful comping gives him plenty of space during solos. Holland exploits this space to improvise distinctive melodic architecture, which transcends the low range of his instrument to achieve horn-like clarity and immediacy. On several tracks, the bassist trades fours with Scofield, moments that showcase the pair's close camaraderie. The guitarist is casually brilliant throughout: his guitar tone slightly gritty, wetted with echo; his attack changeable, off-center, always surprising; his phrasing quirky yet logical; his melodic sense unerring. His unique approach to chording—suggestive rather than prescriptive, expressing big ideas with only a few choice notes—is a big factor in the overall success of this duet setting.

Although the music is routinely rewarding, there are standout moments. On Scofield's minor blues—punningly titled "Mine Are Blues"—the duo cuts loose from the comfort zone, soloing, trading, then blowing in tandem. On Holland's "Not for Nothing", an easy swinger in 10/4 time, the guitarist sounds like he's got a big smile on his face as he unleashes soulful lines, then lays some ultra-hip chord voicings over the outro vamp. On Holland's "You I Love", he takes a page from the Wes Montgomery playbook, building an improvisation on single-note lines, octaves and chords, then mixing them all together, comping for himself, ending with a definitive statement. The set-concluding, title track is a slice of Americana: Scofield weaving strange but lyrical lines over the tune's "cowboy chords," Holland stepping to the fore with a strong gesture during the latter half of his solo, both finishing their collaborative colloquy in a muted, meditative mood.

For more info visit ecmrecords.com. Scofield is at Warsaw Jun. 12, and The Brooklyn Guitar Festival Allstars "Play John Scofield" (with Nir Felder, Bill Frisell, David Gilmore, Steve

Cardenas, Gilad Hekselman) are at LeFrak Center at Lakeside in Prospect Park Jun. 13 (both events part of the Brooklyn Guitar Festival). See Calendar.



Peregrine
Peter Erskine (Hard Wag)
 by Pierre Giroux

The newly-released *Peregrine* feels less like a project and more like a conversation you happen to overhear at the right moment. Septuagenarian drummer Peter Erskine (who turns 72 on Jun. 5), with Alan Pasqua (piano) and Scott Colley (bass), settle into the album's 11 tracks with the ease of a long association and deep listening. Nothing is forced; everything coalesces. It is that intimacy, which becomes *Peregrine's* quiet strength.

Pasqua's "Gumbo Time" opens with a sly nod to New Orleans, its rhythmic undercurrent gently simmering rather than boiling. The trio resists caricature, opting instead to evoke the city's spirit through color and space. On "BeBop", Keith Jarrett's affectionate gesture to the tradition, the pianist delivers crisp, articulate bop lines, while Colley commands his instrument with muscular assurance. All the while, Erskine keeps the tune moving with interesting timekeeping figures. As The Beach Boys' driving force, Brian Wilson wrote "God Only Knows"

(for the group's 1966 Capitol Records release, *Pet Sounds*), which dealt with the end of a romantic relationship. The rendition of the tune here is treated with reverence. Pasqua captures the reharmonization without disturbing its fragile heart, buoyed by Colley's full-bodied bass support. A welcome surprise is guest Kate Lamont's expressive vocal on Phoebe Snow's "Poetry Man". Two other guests, saxophonist Bob Sheppard and percussionist Brian Kilgore add subtle hues as well.

Throughout, one detects a seasoned patience that recalls the best piano trios of an earlier era. Erskine never crowds the music, offering guiding transitions with a light, decisive touch. Colley listens as much as he speaks, while Pasqua shades every phrase with a storyteller's instinct. The pianist's "Chillipso" delivers exactly what the title promises, easing a calypso lilt into something relaxed yet alert. He stretches the groove just enough to let the phrases develop, while Erskine colors the edges with percussive touches. In 1968, Jimmy Webb wrote "Wichita Lineman", which made *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the 500 best songs of all time. Pasqua's arrangement here is quietly inventive, allowing the melody to linger; he reshapes the harmony with patience, letting Colley anchor the song, while the nominal leader's brushwork whispers in the background. Album closer is Pasqua's "Dear Chick", on which the trio offers a perky salute to the unattributed "Chick" (presumably pianist Corea).

Throughout, Pasqua's harmonic imagination, Erskine's clarity and Colley's grounding, create a dialogue that feels both immediate and enduring. Even at its most understated, this trio evokes history, friendships and a shared musical language.

For more info visit hardwagrecords.com. Erskine is at Village Vanguard Jun. 16-21 (with Fred Hersch). See Calendar.