



**Dear Mr. Bennett
PS Mr. Bennett**
John Pizzarelli (Green Hill)
by George Kanzler

While the album *Dear Mr. Bennett* has been out for a few months, guitarist-singer John Pizzarelli has just added the EP *PS Mr. Bennett*, with five more tracks celebrating the music of Tony Bennett (1926-2023) in commemoration of the seminal jazz-pop singer's centennial. The recordings also celebrate the disappearing tradition of the singer-instrumentalist jazz trio that Pizzarelli is an exemplar of.

Famously popularized by Nat King Cole and more recently Diana Krall, here Pizzarelli celebrates that same piano, guitar and bass trio format. And like Cole's, this trio features an exceptional pianist, Isaiah J. Thompson, as well as topnotch bassist Mike Karn. The music covers a wide range of Bennett's career, from his earliest big hits to his iconic signature songs. But Pizzarelli and Bennett differ as singers: akin to boxing, they are like Sugar Ray Robinson (Pizzarelli) opposed to Rocky Graziano; or, in dancing, Fred Astaire opposed to Gene Kelly (Bennett). Bennett was dramatic, almost operatic, while Pizzarelli is breezy, almost vocally diffident at times. That said, Pizzarelli honors Bennett well, even singing many of the songs largely over piano accompaniment, as the honoree did.

The *Dear Mr. Bennett* album covers many of his career highlights, from the singer's first number one hit song, "Because of You" (1951), to his most iconic signature song, "I Left My Heart in San Francisco", which stayed on the Billboard album charts for almost three full years. And Bennett's famous collaborations with pianist Bill Evans are fondly remembered with Evans' own "Waltz for Debby", presented solo by Pizzarelli, singing with his own guitar; and "Young and Foolish", sung over piano and bass. The album also features a tour-de-force for the trio in Duke Ellington's 1931 toe-tapper, "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)", with Pizzarelli's scatting along to his guitar solos and trading with Thompson's swinging fours. Also featured are a quartet of Cy Coleman-Carolyn Leigh songs. Not to miss is Bennett's tango hit, "The Boulevard of Broken Dreams".

Duke Ellington, an idol of Bennett, who mentored the young singer and encouraged his painting talents, shows up again on *PS Mr. Bennett*, with "In My Solitude", Pizzarelli incorporating stop-time breaks into it. The EP also features Bennett's rare, self-penned hit, "Making That Love Scene", as well as the title song from his 1963 hit album *I Wanna Be Around*, penned by Johnny Mercer expressly for Bennett. The EP closes with Pizzarelli's guitar in an instrumental of "We'll Be Together Again", coupled with a vocal of "The Touch of Your Lips", adding Karn's bass.

For more info visit greenhillmusic.com. The albums release concert is at Birdland Aug. 4-8. See Calendar.



Alone Together
Louis Stewart/Brian Dunning (Livia)
by Ken Dryden

Irish guitarist Louis Stewart (1944-2016) is an overlooked artist among US jazz fans, simply because he did most of his performing and recording in the UK. But during his long career, Stewart (whose ten-year deathaversary is this month) made many important recordings as a leader, along with being a sideman for such names as Benny Goodman, Clark Terry, George Shearing and Ronnie Scott. This live concert duo, with flute player (and fellow Irishman) Brian Dunning, recorded in 1979 at Dublin's Peacock Theatre, showcases their incredible chops, deep knowledge of a wide range of music and their ability to anticipate each other's path on the bandstand.

The set list is a blend of standards, bossa nova and classic jazz tunes. Although guitar-flute duos are rarely heard in jazz, their mastery of this instrumentation reveals the freedom available without having additional players. Stewart is hardly playing background to Dunning's inspired improvisations, as his lines are just as unpredictable, starting with a dazzling rendition of the chestnut "There Will Never Be Another You". Their lyrical, lighthearted exploration of Chick Corea's "Windows" suggests a sunny spring day with birds singing. Their improvised "Definitely Doctored" gets its name from having part of its introduction edited out during production, though the communication is so tight it actually gives the impression of being a composed work. Joe Henderson's "Inner Urge" is a favorite of saxophonists, and here Stewart and Dunning reshape the piece to fit their approach without losing any of its furious sound, as they negotiate its many twists with some of this album's most dazzling playing.

"Alone Together" has long been a favorite standard of jazz instrumentalists; Stewart sets it up with a long introduction before Dunning joins him, breaking new ground versus simply rehashing more familiar approaches. Even a demanding song like Charlie Parker's rapid-fire "Donna Lee", a contrafact of "(Back Home Again in) Indiana", presents little challenge to the two masters who work in playful quotes as they go. The two studio bonus tracks are also enjoyable. The offbeat setting of "Someday My Prince Will Come" plays around the edges of its theme, emphasizing the joy within this standard, while their spirited rendition of Wes Montgomery's "West Coast Blues" adds an unnamed bassist.

The revival of the Livia record label has given jazz guitar fans another opportunity to learn more about Louis Stewart. This is but one of his numerous and memorable sessions, which the Irish label has released.

For more info visit liviarecords.com



Organ Monk Sings (Introducing Ms. Raina)
Gregory Lewis (Sunnyside)
by John Pietaro

Gregory Lewis developed the *nom de bop* "Organ Monk" as a mission to prove just how hip the work of the great jazz conceptualist could sound on a Hammond organ. Thelonious Monk, born of the same movement that begat Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Max Roach, looked beyond the advancements of modern jazz toward a modernist jazz previously unimagined: he foresaw abstract expressionism in the music decades before Ornette Coleman's 5-Spot premier. And his compositions, in Lewis' hands, ring authentically as the advanced harmonies become sonic alarm bells over thrashing basslines and crashing melodic weaponry. With the addition of vocalist Raina Welch, Lewis and company beautifully capture even the unsung, painfully beautiful qualities inherent in anything Monk put to manuscript paper.

One of Monk's most perfect ballads, "Ruby, My Dear" features a vocal melody reminiscent of Betty Carter. Lewis' Hammond playing is at a whisper, and Jerry Weldon's tenor floats just overhead. This is an utterly classic rendition of a classic. And this perhaps goes double for "'Round Midnight", the effect of which is a late-night session back when after-hours clubs were essential to the city and the music's growth. Welch's full, evocative, emotive alto brings something very special to this standard. She appears to conjure Carmen McRae with echoes of Sarah Vaughan through each melodic turn, calling on the darkness in that once smoke-filled lounge. And Lewis' breathless solo midway through exudes brilliance, mastery that exposes the weaknesses in far too many who've come before him. This band swings and soars too, with drummer Nasheet Waits' dance over skins and cymbal-driving with his unique command and, as needed, absolute discipline. "Well, You Needn't" is another highlight, its clipped midtempo groove, its swinging vocal, and an all too brief solo by Weldon (his cool, light tone seems inspired by Lester Young, who, too, foresaw the music's next phase). "Straight, No Chaser" is another memorable version of the tune, with Welch managing to breathe even as she sings through the rapid-fire lyric *à la* Annie Ross. The instrumental