

MATTERS OF THE SPIRIT

Reno De Stefano/Michel Donato

Unidisc Music Inc. DSM (3039)

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Reviewed by Howard Paul

Thanks to JJG and the occasional angry letter to its publisher regarding the unsung heroes of Canadian guitar, I made a point of paying special attention to this duo recording by Canadian guitarist/music professor Reno De Stefano. De Stefano has an extraordinary musical pedigree, which includes a BM, MM, and a Ph.D. in jazz musicology. He is widely published as an educator, and prolific as a composer and is much in demand as a lecturer and clinician. He has published two installments of an excellent series of articles on jazz improvisation in Just Jazz Guitar.

But don't hold any of this against him. This fresh CD offers a confident, relaxed melodic approach to standards like "Summertime," "Just Friends," "All The Things You Are," and "Days of Wine and Roses," interspersed with ten original compositions. Here, he is paired with fellow professor and veteran bassist Michel Donato, whose credits include a world-wide tour with Oscar Peterson and performances with the likes of Joe Pass, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Bill Evans and many, many others. The duo format leaves plenty of room for wide-ranging harmonic interpretations and flowing single-note solos. De Stefano's chord-melody approach implies a strong affinity for Joe Pass, and his lines show the heavy influence of Horace Silver. His arrangements are carefully constructed to highlight his immense chord vocabulary. But once out of the melody, Donato is able to imply a full rhythm section's worth of instrumentation, leaving De Stefano to roam outside the boundary of tonal centers.

De Stefano offers a thoughtful, non-aggressive approach to the guitar. His CD cover pictures him playing a Gibson Wes Montgomery model, from which he nurses a bright, resonant, and even tone. If he perhaps lacks a little fire in his playing, he more than makes up for it with straight-ahead, firm intellectual approach to every tune. His version of "Just Friends" offers a fine example of his even-handed, melodic methodology, which keeps the listener well grounded without harkening back to the melody. My

personal favorite is De Stefano's own composition and CD opener—a minor jazz waltz entitled “Incident Mineur.”

Canada is slowly gaining her much-deserved credit for a number of new standout jazz guitarists, and Reno De Stefano should be counted among them. Here is a credit to academia—a performance professor with a “Spirit” for performing.

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