

John Scofield, *This Meets That* (Emarcy)

Aside from being one of the principal innovators of modern jazz guitar, John Scofield is a creative artist of an even rarer sort: a stylistic chameleon who has forged a consistent, rock-solid aesthetic identity. An artist with fan bases in many camps and nearly three dozen albums to his credit, he has expressed himself in the vernacular of bebop, blues, jazz-funk, organ jazz, acoustic chamber jazz, electronically tinged groove music and orchestral ensembles with ease and enthusiasm. From early on, his versatility and technical mastery won him sideman gigs with Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, Gerry Mulligan, Chet Baker and Cobham/Duke among many. Regardless of the stylistic setting, his distinct guitar sound and compositions are unmistakably Scofieldesque, always coupled with an improvisational excellence dedicated to the finest in jazz tradition.

Following celebrated runs on the Enja, Arista, Gramavision, Blue Note and Verve labels, Scofield is proud to release his first project for Emarcy, *This Meets That*. The album finds Scofield once again in the company of what he calls his "A-Team" - bassist Steve Swallow and drummer Bill Stewart — the trio that released *En Route* in 2004. Added to that, the four-part horn section of Roger Rosenberg on baritone sax and bass clarinet, Jim Pugh on trombone, Lawrence Feldman on tenor sax and flutes and John Swana on trumpet and flugelhorn. A special treat, one tune also features special guest Bill Frisell on tremolo guitar. The parts, arranged by Scofield himself, give the music a broader harmonic dimension. "When I compose a tune," he explains, "I often hear more parts than I end up playing on the guitar, so on this record I added the horns. We still keep our "trio thing" intact, but the sound is extended and shaded. They embellish what we're doing."

Scofield's music responds well to such extension, as heard on his remarkable 1996 acoustic album *Quiet*, and the more recent *Scorched* ("Scofield Orchestrated"), a 2003 collaboration with the British classical composer Mark-Anthony Turnage. *This Meets That* has a similar textural lushness, but also a raw and visceral impact thanks to his often biting guitar tone and the trio's rhythmic energy. "All these tunes swing," Scofield points out. "One may be funky, another may be country, but the swing element is important to all of them."

Of course, swing requires finely honed rapport, and that's where Swallow and Stewart come in. Before *En Route*, this rhythm section appeared on *Quiet* as well as *I Can See Your House From Here*, Scofield's 1993 collaboration with Pat Metheny. Swallow produced several early Scofield titles and played in a previous Sco-led trio with drummer Adam Nussbaum — the band that recorded *Shinola* and *Out Like a Light* in the early 80's. "Steve has been a huge part of my development since I met him in 1973," John says. "Now we're aged contemporaries, but when it started, he was the established great and I was the kid." As for Stewart: "From the first time I heard him I loved his snap crackle, you know? He usually takes the best solo of the night, in the most musical way. The three of us have an intimacy in our musical exchange that only exists after like-minded individuals play together for decades. It's really special for me."

This Meets That features a brief appearance by another of Sco's admired colleagues: fellow guitar innovator Bill Frisell. "We made two records as half of Bass Desires in the '80s, and then I featured Bill on my 1991 album *Grace Under Pressure*," Scofield elaborates. "Last winter, Bass Desires reformed for a tiny reunion tour of Europe, I found out that Bill was going to be in New York at the Vanguard months later while we were in the studio. We played 'House of the Rising Sun' on the gigs, and already had a good concept, so I asked him to come down and record it with us."

This Meets That also includes a riotous version of "Satisfaction" by the Rolling Stones. "That and 'House of the Rising Sun' are two of the first songs I ever learned on the guitar," he recalled. "I took up the guitar at 11, and after perfecting Greensleeves and some other delicate folk faves, these tunes were really my start. Jazz came a few years later." To this day, Scofield often phrases with a pronounced touch of rock and blues, no matter how advanced the harmonic

context. His lyrical rendering of the '70s Charlie Rich country hit "Behind Closed Doors" is further evidence of his omnivorous musical taste.

The originals on *This Meets That* are tunes that Scofield and company first performed as a trio, and they retain their loose and jazzy immediacy here. Swallow anchors and solos with customary brilliance, Scofield expands the sonic horizon with occasional guitar effects and sampling as Stewart shakes and stirs. The horns alternate mellow contrast with added punch.

On "The Low Road, we tune our low strings down to C sharp to add some extra low notes to our guitars." Similarly, "Down D" makes use of drop-D tuning, starting with an abstract intro and easing into a calm midtempo feel. "Strangeness in the Night" is one of the more involved tracks — "two songs stuck together," as Scofield puts it. "The first, slower mood is kind of dark and quirky. That's the strangeness part." "Heck of a Job," a wry reference to the Katrina debacle, gets a New Orleans feel going; Scofield notes the "contrapuntal fugue-like idea" articulated by the horns in the coda. "Shoe Dog" and "Memorette" typify two contrasting sides of his compositional skill: the former a slow and skronky groove, the latter a mellow, sophisticated jazz piece in 6/4. Of the more experimental "Pretty Out," Sco says: "It's out, but hopefully it's pretty. This is our free jazz tune. It worked really well with the horns — the trumpet doubles the melody the first time, and baritone sax the second time. Trio Blues" is exactly that — a hard-swinging blues, though not just for trio anymore when augmented by the horns. An alternate take of Trio Blues (without horns) will be made available as an iTunes exclusive. Yet another track (again horn-less), the burning midtempo "Better New Tune," will appear on the Japanese release.

With *This Meets That* and his move to Emarcy, Scofield continues his creative and unpredictable journey as a contemporary jazz master. In the true spirit of collaboration, he regularly lends his talents to varied and illustrious projects. Recent examples include the Grammy nominated *Saudades* with Trio Beyond (Jack DeJohnette, Larry Goldings); *Out Louder* with Medeski, Martin & Wood. *ScoLoHoFo* with Joe Lovano, Dave Holland and Al Foster and *Live at the Warfield* with Phil Lesh and Friends.

Scofield also believes in supporting new talent, as is clear from the presence of fresh faces in his touring bands. "It's the jazz way," Scofield declares. "I started out so inspired by my elders, and I got to play with many of the guys I listened to on records, like Miles, Joe Henderson, Chick and Herbie, like Steve Swallow for that matter. Then you get to pass it on. That's the way life works. . . in music, we really get to share and grow."