

John Scofield - Past Present (2015)

Written by bluesever

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JOHN SCOFIELD PAST PRESENT



1. *Slinky* 2. *Chap Dance* 3. *Hangover* 4. *Museum* 5. *Season Creep* 6. *Get Proud* 7. *Enjoy The Future!* 8. *Mr. Puffy* 9. *Past Present* John Scofield (guitar) Joe Lovano (tenor saxophone) Ben Street (bass) Bill Stewart (drums)

During the '90s, ever-changing guitarist John Scofield paired with saxophonist and fellow Berklee alum Joe Lovano, drummer Bill Stewart, and bassists Charlie Haden, Marc Johnson, and Dennis Irwin, respectively, for three highly praised albums, *Time on My Hands* (1990), *Meant to Be* (1990), and *What We Do* (1992). Those albums found the oft-electrified Scofield, who played with Miles Davis in the '80s, investigating songs of a more acoustic, often straight-ahead, pre-fusion jazz style. After an over 20-year break, Scofield reunited with Lovano and Stewart for 2015's *Past Present*. Also joining the group this time is longtime Scofield associate bassist Larry Grenadier, who replaces the late Irwin. As with the quartet's previous work, *Past Present* is a largely acoustic jazz album, with Scofield playing on an amp'd, semi-hollow-body guitar. Scofield also supplies all of the compositions on *Past Present*, some of which, poignantly, were inspired by his son Evan Scofield, who died from cancer at age 26 in 2013. While the music on *Past Present* harks back to jazz's pre-rock-influenced golden age, there's nothing retro, staid, or unadventurous about the group's performance.

This is propulsive, often angular and kinetic music that touches upon low-down blues ("Slinky"), Horace Silver-esque soul-jazz ("Get Proud"), and airy, swinging post-bop ("Museum"). In that sense, it brings to mind the '70s work of Scofield contemporary Pat Martino. Barring 2003's *Oh!* by the supergroup ScoLoHoFo, *Past Present* is one of the few times Lovano has recorded with Scofield in recent years and it's invigorating to hear them together; Lovano's warm saxophone dances against the crunchy decay of Scofield's guitar. It's that burlap-on-velvet combination that gives cuts like the languid "Hangover" and the moody "Season Creep" an organic, tactile quality. There's also a gleeful, almost comedic nature to the quartet's interplay, as if the musicians are sharing an inside joke. "Chap Dance," a bright, Western-swing-meets-soul-bop cut, is clearly a somewhat cheeky nod to saxophonist Sonny Rollins' take on "I'm an Old

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Cowhand." However, the comedic quality sometimes takes on a nuanced, melancholic tone, as on "Mr. Puffy." A reference to Evan Scofield's appearance while undergoing chemotherapy, the song starts out sounding sad, then quickly transitions into a tougher, overtly funky midsection anchored by a guttural, low-end riff from Lovano. Ultimately, the track, as with all of Past Present, is rife with love and in-the-moment energy inspired by Scofield's past experience, but created with a hopeful eye to the future. ---Matt Collar, Rovi

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