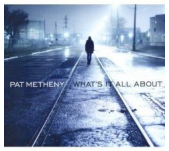
Pat Metheny - What's It All About (2011)



1. The Sound of Silence (Paul Simon) 6:33 2. Cherish (Terry Kirkman) 5:25 play *3. Alfie (Burt Bacharach & Hal David) 7:41 4. Pipeline (Bob Spickard & Brian Carman) 3:23 5. Garota de Ipanema (Antonio Carlos Jobim & Vinicius de Moraes) 5:07 6. Rainy Days and Mondays (Roger S. Nichols & Paul H. Williams) 7:10 7. That's the Way I've Always Heard It Should Be (Carly Simon & Jacob Brackman) 5:57 8. Slow Hot Wind (Henry Mancini & Normal Gimbel) 4:23 9. Betcha by Golly, Wow (Thomas Bell & Linda Creed) 5:12 10. And I Love Her (John Lennon & Paul McCartney) 4:22*
play

Personnel: Pat Metheny: baritone guitar (2, 3, 5-9), 42-string Pikasso guitar (1), 6-string guitar (4), nylon-string guitar (10)

The jazz tradition has long taken pop songs, reimagined and reinvented them harmonically and rhythmically and re-presented them as vehicles for improvisation. Pat Metheny has done something different on What's It All About, his second Nashville-tuned baritone acoustic guitar record (with a handful of other acoustic instruments and no overdubs, but there are edits). Here he performs ten pop songs that have long been part of his personal arcana and recorded them so that we might hear what's inside these songs -- as songs. Recorded on a single day in February of 2011, Metheny interprets well-known songs by Paul Simon, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Lennon & McCartney, Henry Mancini, the Ventures, Burt Bacharach, Paul Williams, Terry Kirkman, Carly Simon, Thom Bell, and others across the pop spectrum. His approach is deliberate; his interest here is in the subtlety of melody; its nuance, suggestion, and mystery; he finds the places he hears inside the music before these songs even begin, or just after they end, through a unique series of tunings he employs between A-flat and C. "The Sound of Silence" opens the set by suggesting the tones of a Japanese koto in its intro (courtesy of his 42-string Pikasso guitar). When the melody commences, its languorous richness and rhythmic balance are so perfect, we hear it not only as the pop song we remember by Simon & Garfunkel, but as a lyric invention that is almost magical in its possibility. The version of Kirkman's "Cherish" (a big hit by the Association), is equally profound. He finds the space where the human voice inserts itself in the harmonic structure and opens it with his guitar. There is slightly more improvisation

in "Alfie," but it's open, spacious, and full of hinted-at dimensions in the crafting of the song's parameters. "Girl from Ipanema," played as discovers suggestions of other -- darker and moodier -- melodies inside it. He pulls out both the implied elegance in "That's the Way I've Always Heard It Should Be," and the quietly majestic variety of it in "Rainy Days and Mondays." "Betcha by Golly, Wow" stands as a revelation: its truly inventive harmonies and jazz syncopations are -- and one suspects they always have been -- inherent in the tune's basic architecture. In closer "And I Love Her" are the direct implications of bossa that Lennon and McCartney had no doubt taken note of at the time. Ultimately, What's It All About is an intimate work revealing Metheny's investigation of composition itself. The notion of song is inherent in everything he does, and he reveals that inspiration in spades here. ---Thom Jurek

Pat Metheny has released plenty of solo albums over the years, but One Quiet Night (Nonesuch, 2003) found him turning to a different modus operandi, imposing a series of restrictions: one guitar, one tuning, no overdubs. An intimate album of mostly original material, beyond three covers including Keith Jarrett's "My Song" and Gerry & the Pacemakers' hit, "Ferry Cross the Mersey," One Quiet Night was a more intimate and immediate alternative to his production-heavy Pat Metheny Group releases, and recent solo records like the ambitious Orchestrion (Nonesuch, 2010). What's It All About continues the M.O., but introduces a few changes to the mix. First, while Metheny's rich, low Nashville-tuned baritone acoustic guitar dominates the set, he does employ a handful of other acoustic instruments this time around, in particular his massive 42-string Pikasso guitar on the opener, an exploratory look at Simon & Garfunkel's massive hit, "The Sound of Silence." Metheny always confounds the ear with his apparent ease at coaxing a variety of tones and textures from this instrument that, for most, would be impossibly unwieldy. Tuned specifically around the song's harmonic center, Metheny is able to create a rich weave, combining occasional bass lines with strummed open strings and a Gu Zheng-like frontline melody. As ever with Metheny, melody is paramount, as is respect for the song, even as he expands it to nearly seven minutes, occasionally finding his way to relatively simple vamps that act as links between the more familiar themes. Metheny also uses a standard six-string acoustic guitar for his surprising and energetic version of The Ventures' "Pipeline," combining with the hit song's memorable surf-bass line with his penchant for rapid chordal strumming—reverence combined with irreverence. He turns to his nylon-string guitar—a particularly lovely choice—on The Beatles' closer, "And I Love Her," where a gentle Latin rhythm masks the guitarist's ever-impressive sleight-of-hand, with his in-the-moment choices creating an unmistakable feeling of overdubbed self-accompaniment, despite there being none. Another change from One Quiet Night is Metheny's choice of material, this time eschewing original material and, instead, culling from the wealth of hit songs that the guitarist grew up to in the 1960s, that were, as he explains, ..."on my radar before I ever wrote a note of my own, or in a few cases, even before I played an instrument." The Associations' iconic "Cherish" is delivered reasonably reverently, though he gives it a (not surprisingly) Midwestern sheen, while Burt Bacharach/Hal David's smash, "Alfie," is taken ever-so-slightly out through Metheny's

reharmonization—skewed, without ever losing sight of its intrinsic melodism. But the highlight of What's It All About is Metheny's uncharacteristic look at Antonio Carlos Jobim's enduring "Garota (Girl) de Ipanema"—a rubato tone poem suggesting something much darker and dangerous than the breezy ambiance of most versions. With What's It All About, Metheny's ability to think outside the box never comes at the expense of losing sight of it, making music that's easy and accessible, but with deeper layers simmering just beneath its calm surface.
---John Kelman

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