

## CD & PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

### DOUBLE GEMINI,

The Jazz Box, Jim Fisch, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Guitar Magazine, 1998

I've got no problem with rock music, but I do tend to blanch any time I see a jazz artist releasing an album filled with pop titles...flashbacks from ill fated jazz/rock experiments in the late '60's I suppose. Too often it ends up sounding like the musical equivalent of a shotgun marriage, with neither side being very comfortable with the connubial arrangements. So you can just about imagine my reaction when I perused the back cover of Paul Bollenback's latest, DOUBLE GEMINI (Challenge) and saw tunes from Hootie and the Blowfish, Earth Wind and Fire, Sting and (god help me, I sweat it's true!) the Red Hot Chili Peppers. did I shriek...swear...or send a chair hurling towards the CD player? On the contrary, I got up and did the closest thing that I do which resembles dancing. I was loving it!

I'll start by admitting a certain amount of ignorance all of the original recordings, but with a bit of skillful arranging and some reharmonization, Bollenback has managed to fuse the testosterone of rock with the sophistication and swing of jazz. Helping him out in this endeavor are his frequent playmates, organist Joey DeFrancesco and drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts. I guess I really shouldn't be quite so surprised about how well DOUBLE GEMINI works looking back at artists like Jimmy Smith or Grant Green, who always managed to find some great R&B tunes to rework, and both E,W & F's "After the Love Has Gone" and Stevie Wonder's "I am Singing" come across with that same sort of vibe. Watt's drumming on the Wonder tune, by the way, is absolutely killer.

The Chili Peppers' "Breaking the Girl" is one of two tours-de-forces for the trio. Paul's title track is the other. Both are filled with the laser-like licks which the guitarist is known for, and likewise feature some smoldering solos from DeFrancesco. The band manages to play both sides of the fence with Hootie's "Let Her Cry", giving it a churning 7/4 intro that segs into the simple theme, joyously returning to more hot Bollenback guitar. In like fashion, his "Open Hand" manages to reconcile some funky, bluesy lines with a pretty melody, in an extended type of compositional call and response. There is a kinder, gentler side to be found on Bollenback's disc as well, with the guitarist picking up his nylon string Buscarino Cabaret for a subtly pulsing version of Sergio Mendes' samba "So Many Stars". Sting's "Fields of Gold" is given a similar reflective reading and Bollenback's "Cat's Eye" is an acoustic solo highlighted by sparkling guitar tone and a haunting minor theme. His "Reflections of Jaco" is filled with snatches of Pastorius and Weather Report played to the tune of an overdubbed 12-string guitar.

There is an attitude about this disc which is refreshing, honest and often irresistible. Out of a growing group of dazzling young guitarists, it might just be Bollenback who can bring jazz into the homes of Generation X!

### SOUL GROOVES (Challenge)

Josef Woodard, JAZZ TIMES, November 1999

Paul Bollenback, a thinking person's jazz guitarist with a clean 'n' fat tone and a barrel full of chops, has been impressing listeners as a sideman and, increasingly, as a leader in recent years. But inquisitive minds want to know, is he mainstream? Left-of-mainstream? Or a work-in-progress? Probably all of the above. Bollenback has been heard alongside saxists Gary Thomas, Gary Bartz, and especially as a commanding, critical 1/3 of Joey DeFrancesco's organ trio. But, more and more, Bollenback is breaking out as a leader now with three CDs out under his name, on the Dutch-based Challenge label, including the latest, *Soul Grooves*. For a programmatic focus, Bollenback decided to interpret old Motown tunes, including material by Marvin Gaye, Otis Redding and Stevie Wonder. "That was stuff I was into when I was a kid, listening to WNEW in New York" Bollenback says. "Being a kid, I didn't think much about what it was or why it did what it did. You just listen, and dig it."

In a sense, the album is a continuation of his previous album, *Double Gemini*, but with a looser interpretative approach to the cover material. "With this latest recording, I decided to go all out. So you might not recognize the tune immediately." "My Girl", for instance, is reborn as a swing tune in 7/4, but with its familiar melodic components intact. Growing up just north of New York City, and then moving to Washington, D.C.--with a short, influential stint in New Delhi, India--Bollenback found himself lured away from rock and roll upon hearing John McLaughlin circa the original Mahavishnu Orchestra in the early '70's.

"Hearing all the amazing chops and fire that John and the band had, it really turned me on. That led me to Miles, which led me to "Trane. I really didn't start listening intensively to jazz until I was about 17. Then I heard a Best of Coltrane album, with "Giant Steps" and "Cousin Mary" and "Naima" and I just loved it. For me, that was it."

### Washington Post, Mike Joyce (excerpt from Performance Review)

"Bollenback...introduced and improvised on the melodies in alternately single-note and chordal fashion. His earthy, bent-note vocal inflections, dizzying, bop-inspired flights and graceful but slightly abstract lyricism help put a fresh spin on such familiar themes as Toots Thielemans's "Bluesette" and Jerome Kern's "All the Things You re..."

### DOUBLE GEMINI (Challenge Records)

John Janowick, Downbeat Magazine, April 1998

It's a pleasure to hear young musicians picking up where Herbie Hancock's *The New Standard* left off. Yes, new standards have been penned since "Autumn Leaves," and in creative hands, the melodies of Stevie Wonder, Sting and even the Red Hot Chili Peppers can serve as vehicles for jazz improvisation.

In this endeavor, guitarist Paul Bollenback is mostly successful. After years as a sideman with organist Joey DeFrancesco, Bollenback has been gaining notice as a talented improviser in his own right. On this disc, his second as a leader, he teams up with his old soul brother DeFrancesco and drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts. From the get-go, Bollenback displays chops galore, a natural feel and an impeccable sense of timing. He burns his way through the Chili Peppers "Breaking The Girl", which lends itself well to this kind of adaptation with its 6/8 meter and inherent tension and release. On "Let Her Cry"...they start with a 7/8 into that Bollenback says he based on a John Coltrane intro to "Body and Soul," and he solos over it with fierce determination. Then he plays the melody a cappella, the trio shifts to a double-time feel for more guitar soloing and Tain and Bollenback drop way back for an organ solo. The peaks and valleys continue through the solos until the song ends the way it started, with Bollenback soloing over the 7/8 meter. Another pleasing track and interesting song choice is Stevie Wonder's "I Am Singing," which ends with a snippet of "Giant Steps." It's details like that - clever connections between the jazz and pop worlds - that this CD could use in more abundance. While Double Gemini delivers mixed results, it must be noted that Bollenback is a monster who's worth a listen by any straight ahead jazz guitarist or enthusiast.

### DOUBLE GEMINI (Challenge Records)

Washington Post, May 3, 1998

At a time when many young jazz musicians are content to recycle the past with rote recitals of vintage tunes, guitarist Paul Bollenback has been looking elsewhere for inspiration. Indeed, several tracks on his new album, "Double Gemini" (Challenge), contribute to a highly improbable repertoire for a jazz artist. The Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Breaking The Girl," Earth Wind & Fire's "After the Love Has Gone" and Hootie and the Blowfish's "Let her Cry" are among the pop, rock and soul tunes that fuel Bollenback's imagination as an arranger and inspire some alternately exhilarating and subtle fretwork.

Since most of the familiar material on the album lacked the harmonic richness and motion that jazz musicians thrive on, Bollenback re-arranged

them to suit his purposes, augmenting the melodies with chord substitutions, improvised passages and shifts in tempo and meter. The results can be bracing, as when Bollenback, organist Joey DeFrancesco and drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts bring a power trio thrust to Stevie Wonder's "I Am Singing." Or they can be insinuating, as when the trio quietly fashions a lovely rendition of Sting's Fields of Gold." Not to be overlooked, though, are Bollenback's own compositions, particularly the elegiac ballad "Reflections of Jaco."

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**ORIGINAL VISIONS (Challenge Records)  
Daring Bollenback - Mike Joyce, Washington Post, 1995 -**

"*Original Visions*," the new album by guitarist Paul Bollenback, comes complete with a glowing endorsement by guitar legend John McLaughlin, whose enthusiasm is easily shared.

After all, what McLaughlin finds so appealing about Bollenback's approach to original pieces and standards -- namely, "his desire to take traditions and show us a new and original way of interpreting them" -- shapes and informs every arrangement. No doubt McLaughlin was particularly flattered by *India Gate*, an homage Bollenback penned for him and one that powerfully evokes a McLaughlin-esque balance of spiritual and rhythmic intensity. No less enjoyable and impressive, though, is the way Bollenback swings through an unusually brisk and tumultuous reading of *The Song Is You*, freshens *Stella by Starlight* with a swift, blue tone and an elliptical approach to melody, and fashions *Lush Life* into an acoustic and contemplative interlude.

Still, Bollenback isn't entirely responsible for the album's abundant soul and surprises. Reed man Gary Thomas, organist Joey DeFrancesco and bassist Ed Howard make strong contributions, and the combination of drummer Terri-Lyne Carrington's exceptional force and finesse helps underscore Bollenback's daring and drive... "

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