

Shared Joe Cohn Contemplations

featuring Peter Beets

J.J. Wiggins
Joost van Schaik
Peter Washington
Willie Jones III



Criss Cross Jazz 1309

Criss 1309 CD

SHARED CONTEMPLATIONS JOE COHN

1. **JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS ***
(C. Porter) 6.28
2. **YOU TURNED THE TABLES ON ME ***
(Mitchell-Alter) 5.29
3. **I GOTTA RIGHT TO SING THE
BLUES**
(H. Arlen) 7.11
4. **I LOVE YOU, SAMANTHA**
(C. Porter) 5.26
5. **BLUE SERGE**
(G. McFarland) 6.54
6. **SOMETHING FOR LISA**
(A. Cohn) 4.28
7. **MAN WITH A HORN ***
(DeLange-Lake-Jenney) 5.37
8. **49TH STREET**
(B. Mobley) 6.10
9. **BARBADOS**
(Ch. Parker) 4.48
10. **DANIELLE ***
(A. Cohn) 6.07

TOTAL TIME: 59.16

JOE COHN guitar
PETER BEETS piano
J.J. WIGGINS bass
PETER WASHINGTON bass *
JOOST VAN SCHAIK drums
WILLIE JONES III drums *
DMITRY BAEVSKY alto sax (7) *

Produced by Gerry Teekens
Recording Engineer: Max Bolleman
Recording Engineer: Michael Marciano *
Mixing: Max Bolleman
Mastering: The Masters
Recorded: October 6, 2007 / June 16, 2008 *
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Shared Contemplations

"I'm a big fan of counterpoint," says **Joe Cohn**. It's an uncomplicated thought, but it tells us a lot about this guitarist's musical universe. Cohn describes himself as an "interactive musician," a weaver of counterpoint with fellow players. "I'm part of the group," he declares. Certainly this is borne out by his barnstorming recent work with the Harry Allen-Joe Cohn Quartet, the Jay Leonhart Trio and others.

Nonetheless, Cohn has recorded under his own name, first in 1997 with *Two Funky People* and then in 2007 with *Restless*. His maiden voyage for **Criss Cross**, **Shared Contemplations**, comes on the heels of sideman appearances on **Grant Stewart + 4** (Criss 1269) and the Peter Beets Trio's **New Groove** (Criss 1296). In these sessions we encounter one of the finest guitarists working today: melodically quick-witted, harmonically astute, relentlessly swinging.

Joe came to jazz guitar relatively late, in 12th grade. But as the son of tenor sax legend Al Cohn and singer Marilyn Moore, he had unusually rich resources to draw upon. Private studies and three years at Berklee (1975-78) led to gigs with Freddy Cole, Artie Shaw, Buddy DeFranco, Al Grey and Nick Brignola, not to mention Al Cohn and his longtime partner, the great Zoot Sims.

In 1983, Joe played a weeklong duo engagement with Zoot and learned enough about counterpoint to last a lifetime. "I was scared to death, practicing like crazy," he recalls. "I didn't think I could be a good

rhythm section to him. Was I in for a surprise! Zoot didn't need a rhythm section. In fact, he became my rhythm section. I never had a better experience musically in my life. And I discovered something important: a rhythm section isn't there to back up the guy, but to react to the guy."

These are the values Joe brings to every session, and they're more than apparent in his rapport with **Peter Beets**. Through Joe's extended visits to Beets's home in The Hague, Holland, he and the pianist have struck up a deep musical bond that pervades the tracks on **Shared Contemplations**. "Peter and I enjoy playing together," says Cohn. "He excites me and makes me play better. He makes me enjoy playing guitar."

Quiet as it's kept, Cohn is also a highly capable bassist, so he has high expectations from that section of the band. "Bass is a perfect example of counterpoint," he observes. He recalls meeting bassist **J. J. Wiggins** (a.k.a. Hassan Shakur) in the late '80s while working with Al Grey. "We had an immediate hookup, and I've loved him ever since. He fires me up. His time feel is right out of my book of favorite time feels. He plays great notes." Drummer **Joost van Schaik**, a veteran of groups led by Philip Catherine and others, came to Joe's attention during a gig in Haarlem, also in Holland. "I thought he sounded great," says Cohn, "and I knew I wanted to use him for the record." Four of the tracks, however, feature Cohn with bassist **Peter Washington** and drummer **Willie Jones III**, the cream of New York rhythm sections.

Powered by the Washington-Jones team, Cohn leaps into Cole Porter's ***Just One of Those Things*** with a charged swing feel right from the top. Beets's piano harmonies carry a hint of hard-edged modal jazz, although Cohn's inspiration in picking the tune comes from elsewhere. "I just love how Red Mitchell accompanies Lee Konitz on this song." (The reference is to Konitz and Mitchell's 1974 duo album *I Concentrate On You.*)

Cohn's bright waltz reading of ***I Gotta Right to Sing the Blues*** is quite a departure from Louis Armstrong's 1933 version, and if there's a surface resemblance to "*Jitterbug Waltz*," that was exactly Cohn's inspiration. "I tried the idea many years ago and I tried it again here," he says. Van Schaik starts with brushes and works up to a tight walking tempo with sticks, while Cohn strings together phrase after beautiful phrase. After statements from Beets and van Schaik, the band winds down with a surprising rubato cadenza and finish.

It was Bing Crosby who first brought Cole Porter's ***I Love You, Samantha*** before the public in the 1956 film *High Society*. But Cohn learned the song from bassist Frank Tate, a friend of his father's, in the late '70s. "Frank was living on Cape Cod and I went and visited him. I didn't know too many songs, and Frank told me not to learn just those Real Book songs. So he taught me this one and I finally recorded it, some 30 years later. It wasn't supposed to be a bossa. I just did it that way, on the spot."

The ***Blue Serge*** played by Cohn and friends is not to be confused with Mercer Ellington's 1941 classic. This, rather, is a slow blues by Gary McFarland. "It comes from Al and Zoot," Cohn reports. Beets leads off the solos and the band's chemistry is deep, the beat big and spacious. Joe states the closing theme in soulful octaves. Delving into another type of blues entirely, the group also offers ***Barbados***, Charlie Parker's prescient Latin-swing number, an off-the-cuff choice in the studio that highlights Cohn in fine burning form.

Something for Lisa, a catchy bop-oriented line, appears on recordings by Chet Baker and Conte Candoli, but mislabeled as "*Something for Liza*." Joe is a reliable source on this: the "Lisa" in question is his older sister, and this is Al Cohn's tribute to her. "She's been a positive influence in my life," says Joe, "and my first love of music came from listening to her play classical piano." Joe has dusted off many other Al Cohn gems on recordings over the years, including "*Take Four*," "*Two Funky People*," "*You and Me*," "*Fast*," "*Woody's Lament*," "*Mr. George*" and "*High on You*." ***Danielle***, another Al Cohn tune, appears on the current date as well. Joe believes his father wrote it for Zoot's sister. "So there are two sister songs on this record," he laughs.

On ***Man With a Horn***, a ballad handled very differently by Anita O'Day and Nina Simone, the young **Dmitry Baevsky** makes his cameo on alto sax (with Washington and Jones providing support). Baevsky played a prominent role on Cohn's previous album, *Restless*. Their

duet on "*I Wonder Where Our Love Has Gone*" harks back directly to Cohn's special week of duets with Zoot Sims — an atmosphere Joe loves to revisit. "Dmitry used to sit in at Smalls," Cohn recounts. "He hired me for a gig and we became friends instantly. We've been playing on and off for the last seven years. We play contrapuntally together."

You Turned the Tables on Me, a standard of 1930s vintage recorded most famously by Benny Goodman, finds Cohn mixing it up with Beets, Washington and Jones. Forgoing an introduction, the band pushes off in a relaxed two feel and moves to grooving midtempo swing for Cohn's second chorus. Beets follows with a bluesy and well-paced solo before joining Cohn in a round of eights, then fours.

49th Street, by trumpeter Bill Mobley, is a devilishly complex, Tristano-reminiscent theme over "*Lover*" changes. "I played with Bill in the '90s," Cohn says. "I used to go to his building in Brooklyn and one day he threw this in front of me. I loved it and kept it. The highest note in the tune is the highest note on my guitar. There's no way to get up to it comfortably." Cohn and Beets state the elaborate head in unison, punctuated by van Schaik's asides on brushes. Solos follow by Cohn, Beets and van Schaik as well. "Peter read the melody right on the date, cold," marvels Cohn. "He never practiced it. It was astounding."

If jazz is about passing the tradition down through the generations, it's even more stark in the case of Joe Cohn, whose inheritance from Al

Cohn resonates in every bar of music on **Shared Contemplations**. And now Joe sees the legacy manifested in his own 26-year-old daughter, Shaye, a pro trumpeter who shares her grandfather's commitment to Tatum, Ellington and Armstrong. "It's like a gift that my father left me," says Joe, commenting on the body of cherished Al Cohn tunes but alluding to Al's example as a whole — a music rich in swing, lyrical expression and, of course, counterpoint.

David R. Adler
Time Out New York, Jazz Times