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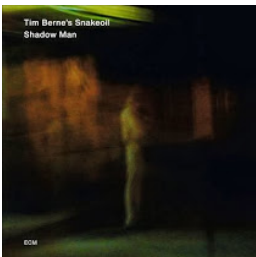
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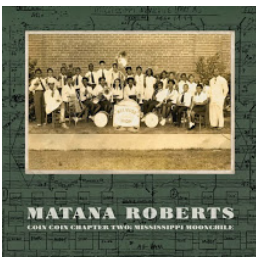
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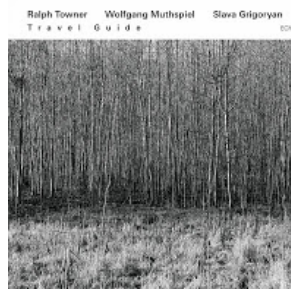
### Guitars, guitars, guitars, guitars, guitars, ....

By [Stef](#)

For one or the other reason, plenty of guitar albums have remained unreviewed on this blog, and maybe that's due to the instrument itself, somehow less suited for free improv than sax or trumpet or piano, and maybe that's due to the reviewers, who are themselves musicians on other instruments. Or maybe the guitar is less a jazz or free improv instrument, and more of a rock tool, easier to blend genres and hence risking to fall without the already flexible criteria of this blog's profile. Whatever the reason, I thought it would make some sense to review some of the recent albums in which the guitar plays a decisive role in the overall sound, and this across all subgenres, from the nervous intimacy of an acoustic Derek Bailey to the terrifying armageddon of an electric Richard Pinhas. And yes, we cross genres here.

But let's start with the traditionalists

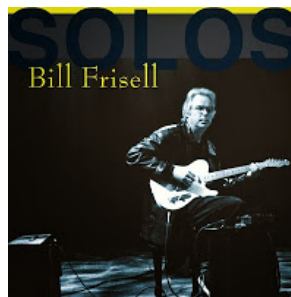
#### Ralph Towner, Slava Grigoryan, Wolfgang Muthspiel - Travel Guide (ECM, 2013)



When many years younger, "*Sargasso Sea*", with John Abrecrombie and Ralph Towner was one of those albums I could listen to in quieter moments, just like I like "*Batik*" and "*Solstice*", in my ECM period. Yet there is only so much I can have of this. It is beautiful music, somewhat lacking tension and intensity, but beautiful.

After their previous album "*From A Dream*" (2008), we find Ralph Towner back with Wolfgang Muthspiel and Slava Grigoryan. Towner on his usual classical and 12-string classical guitars, Muthspiel on electric guitar and Grigoryan on classical and baritone guitars. The music is sophisticated, refined, subtle, and inobtrusive. This is like the opposite of a Derek Bailey album. As uneventful as watching a horizon on an aquarel painting.

#### Bill Frisell - Solos - The Jazz Sessions (Original Spin, 2013)



Guitar wizard Bill Frisell's technical skills and innovative power keeps amazing me. This is the

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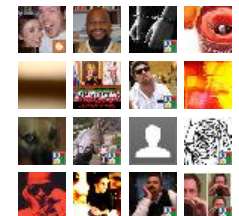
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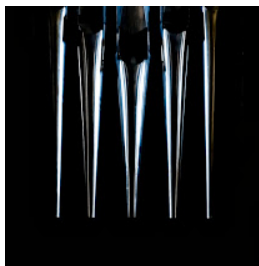


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WARREN SMITH

## ALBUMS OF THE MONTH



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Wedding Music

## HAMID DRAKE



## RAYMOND STRID



## KLAUS KUGEL

WHAT I APPRECIATE IN  
MUSIC & HOW TO  
EVALUATE IT FOR OTHERS

Here are some criteria which I find very important, and true, there may be overlap between them all, but they still have their specific shades and colors of value, and there may be other criteria to add.

1. **AUTHENTIC** : the emotions have to be real, genuine and truthful, the prime objective should be to create good music for the sake of the music itself (not in order to sell, or to show off, or any other thing ...). That's why I like improvised music, because the link between emotion, musician, sound and listener is to be found in its purest form. It's your immediate emotion you're transmitting, not someone else's. Paradoxically enough, this also includes "absence of self", as a prerequisite for true interplay, listening skills and communion between band members.

2. **ADVENTUROUS** : the artist/band should be looking for new ways to express what they feel

CD or download version of a DVD series that highlight the solo performances of some great contemporary American jazz musicians. As you can expect, Frisell is excellent at this : clear-toned, sometimes mellow on traditionals, or bluesy as on "Masters Of War" or "Boubacar". There are no real new tunes, just solo performances of material to be found elsewhere on his extensive discography. So far the whole performance is quite intimate and interspersed with short interviews. It's only on the long "Shenandoah" that he shows his other side, using dub and delay and distortion for a while, but then his softer side seems to win, quieting the inner voice of revolt into one of discipline and control. Excellent stuff.

Listen and download from [eMusic](#).

Another approach is to mix guitars with influences from other cultures, often with success if done respectfully.

## Paolo Angeli - Sale Quanto Basta (Rer, 2013)



I know Italian guitarist Paolo Angeli only from "Uotua", his duo release with Hamid Drake on percussion, but this one is slightly different. It is more welcoming and accessible, with his custom Sardinian acoustic guitar playing all the various parts of the compositions dubbed in various layers, as if you're listening to a guitar ensemble.

Angeli starts from what we know, traditional guitar playing, then adds his bowed playing, adds interesting new sounds and arrangements. On some tracks he sings, and like on his playing, he is not scared to do what he thinks needs to be done, without compromise for audience preferences. It is in this sense quite authentic and vulnerable too. Unfortunately the whole album is not of the same level, with possibly too many styles and approaches. More unity of voice and atmosphere, could have made this album even stronger.

Listen and download from the [label](#).

## Yang Jing &amp; Christy Doran - No.9 (Leo, 2013)



Christy Doran is an incredible guitarist, yet has in my opinion had difficulties in finding his own kind of music, varying between free jazz, rock and fusion, but on this album, in the company of Yang Jing on pipa and guzheng, the collaboration and the sound are pitch perfect. This music is intimate, beautiful and wonderful. It has an aesthetic that is hard to qualify, with Jing and Doran demonstrating what accuracy and precision can mean to an overall sound, even if the notes are limited and sparse, Doran can't help himself and needs to give some fast runs once in a while, but then there not of the showing off kind.

A highly unusual yet very nice album.

Listen on [CDUniverse](#).

## Takuo Tanikawa - Music For Contemporary Kagura (Improvising Beings, 2013)



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