

JAZZ, PURE, PAST AND PRESENT

Jazz guitar maestro John Scofield has the ability to ace it with his guitar work in a variety of genres, from jazz and rock to the blues

I'M SITTING here on a Saturday evening and writing this in Vaasa, a city on the west coast of Finland. It has a population of 66,000; is walkably small; and the temperature at 5pm outside is around 10 degree Celsius. Inside, the heating makes it nice and comfortable and, I'm sipping a cup of chamomile tea. Why I'm saying all this is because there's another thing about Vaasa or, perhaps, about all of Finland and most of Scandinavia – it is the quiet; the near total absence of noise or sound. It's almost as if you've a pair of noise cancelling headphones jammed on your head. That's why I'm listening to music sans my trusty earphones. I'm playing them through a moderately powerful wireless speaker system and my selection for this evening has begun with jazz. More specifically, it is John Scofield's new album, *Past Present*.

The album title is significant. Scofield is a jazz guitar maestro who has played with a range of musicians that is



A NOTE OF MELANCHOLY

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ist Lovano, drummer Bill Stewart (who'd played on some of Scofield's 1990s bebop compositions) and bassist Larry Grenadier, team up to deliver a jazz album that is played on traditional acoustic instruments (even Scofield's guitar is acoustic but powered by an amplifier). The nine tracks are like a nostalgic trip back to the bebop era of the 1940s when rock hadn't dipped deeply into jazz's oeuvre to borrow heavily and fusion wasn't a word common in music. Listening to them at moderate volume levels amid Vaasa's quietness, I couldn't help but marvel at the greatness of members of Scofield's minimalist ensemble. All the compositions are Scofield's and although they're wrought in the upbeat bebop style, there's something laidback and effortless about them – only musicians as good as these can make something sound so stunning without appearing to be trying hard at all! I also read that *Past Present* was composed by Scofield in memory of his son who died a few years back of cancer in his twenties. That added a tinge of sadness to Saturday evening's listening session.

After Scofield, I turned to India and chose a local band from my city. When Delhi band Man.Goes Human nudged me on Twitter to check out their new self-titled album, I wasn't sure what I was going to hear. What I got was a big and very pleasant surprise. The band, which describes itself as purveyors of "Progressive, Classic, Alternative Rock", has everything that I look for in a band. Their music (Noni on lead; Paul on vocals and guitar; Shitij who writes the lyrics and plays bass; and the remarkable Kaprila on vocals) has the requisite dose of originality despite the many obvious influences; what's more, it is refreshingly low-fi and not ear-splittingly loud. That's why they made it to my playlist. I think a Man.Goes Human gig could be worth checking out.

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PLEASANT SURPRISE

Delhi-based band Man.Goes Human has the requisite dose of originality and is refreshingly low-fi

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impressive not just because of their names (they include Miles Davis, Joe Henderson, Jaco Pastorius, Phil Lesh, John Mayer and Medeski, Martin & Wood) but also because of his ability to ace it with his guitar work in genres such as jazz, jazz-rock, rock, soul, blues... you name it, he's done it. If you try to check out his own albums (the ones he has played as a leader of a band) you'll be spoilt for choice because there are nearly 50 of them since the 1970s that you would have to choose from. And if you want to also listen to ones on which he's played as a part of someone else's band (such as Billy Cobham, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock and many, many more), you'll likely be staring at another 100 albums.

In the 1980s, Scofield, a Berklee alum, now 63, turned from pure jazz to fusion – a genre that has marked his career for many years now. But, in the early 1990s, he and his quartet did a few albums for the venerable jazz label, Blue Note (on one of them, *Time on My Hands*, his band members included drummer Jack DeJohnette, saxophonist Joe Lovano and bassist Charile Haden). These were works of pure jazz of the high-paced, up-tempo bebop kind and showcased each of the quartet member's virtuosity. But after two or three albums, Scofield went back to fusion and experimenting, playing with a range of musicians and dabbling in various genres, creating albums that sounded absolutely superb for many like us but perhaps not what would hook the purists.

In *Past Present* (and that is why it is significantly named), Scofield, saxophon-

VERSATILE OEUVRE

Scofield has played with a range of musicians, including the likes of Miles Davis



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