



## TALMAGE FARLOW

*A Film By Lorenzo DeStefano*

Originally released in 1981, but only now available on DVD, this swinging, intimate portrait of one of jazz guitar's most innovative and enigmatic players will thrill dedicated guitar heads, regardless of stylistic persuasion. Director Lorenzo DeStefano finds Tal Farlow in his waterside home in Sea Bright, New Jersey, where the guitarist—then in his late 50s—was living a quiet life of fishing, sign painting, and playing occasional gigs in local bars. It wasn't always that way: From 1949 to 1953, Farlow was the toast of the jazz guitar world, playing with bassist Charles Mingus in the Red Norvo Trio. Farlow's huge hands allowed him to fret lightning fast bebop lines and radical chord voicings, and thus develop a sound that was remarkably different from such contemporaries as Barney Kessel and Herb Ellis. For reasons that are slowly revealed in the film, Farlow dropped out of the jazz scene to embrace a more contemplative existence.

*Talmage Farlow* has many magical moments: We watch the lanky guitarist rehearse with bass virtuoso Red Mitchell and piano colossus Tommy Flanagan (Sonny Rollins, Wes Montgomery, Ella Fitzgerald, John Coltrane) for a "comeback" concert in New York City's famed Public Theater, and then see the trio bring down the house in the sold-out performance. Another highlight is when Lenny Breau arrives—Tom Holmes solidbody in hand—at Farlow's house to meet the master for the first time, jam, and sit in at one of Farlow's club dates. It's fascinating to see the two guitarists—who have utterly different technical and

sonic takes on the 6-string—find common ground in their love for improvisation and jazz tunes.

The film is packed with footage of Farlow playing, and when he's not attacking the flatwound strings on his Gibson archtop, his recorded lines provide a backdrop to the on-screen drama. Like Farlow's tone, the film's colors are beautifully rich and muted, and DeStefano's deft editing keeps the emotional

tension building to the final credits. It's worth noting that the musicians we see performing—Farlow, Breau, Flanagan, and Mitchell—are all dead, so this movie is as much about a sound and vibe that's vanished from our world as it is the story of a complex and gifted guitarist. A young George Benson is among those who provide background commentary on Farlow's place in the jazz-guitar firmament, and if you look carefully at the closing scene, you'll even see *GP*'s founding publisher Jim Crockett (one of the film's executive producers) hanging with Farlow. Whether you're searching for soulful guitar playing or a poignant tale of creative struggle, *Talmage Farlow* delivers. MVD. —Andy Ellis



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