



OSCAR PETERSON TRIO

The Berlin Concert — Inakustik #INAK 6460 DVD
Web: www.in-akustik.com 79282 Ballrechten-Dottingen, Germany. *Salute to Bach; Who Can I Turn To; Blues Etude; Yours Is My Heart Alone; Falling in Love With La Belle Province; Nigerian Marketplace; Cakewalk; Skylark — My Foolish Heart; Perdido; Caravan*
PERSONNEL: Oscar Peterson, piano; Niels-Henning Oersted Pederson, bass; Martin Drew, drums

By Curtis Davenport

By now the phrase “living legend” has been attached so often to Oscar Peterson’s name, that he

should trademark it. However, it is so appropriate to use it when talking about Canada’s greatest gift to jazz, that as clichéd as it sounds, I can’t help but say it. Peterson’s influence on the world of jazz has spanned seven decades and parts of two centuries, having played with virtually every major figure in jazz from Lady Day, to Bird to Prez, to Diz and the list goes on and on.

The most wonderful thing about this all is that Peterson has been with us long enough, to be a part of the era when we began to realize how important it is to document the genius of Peterson and others like him on film and video, for this and future generations to enjoy. Being in my mid forties, by the time I took a serious interest in jazz, in my early twenties, many

of the giants of jazz were either gone or way past their primes; so while I’ve had myriad opportunities to *hear* the greats, I had few chances to catch them in peak performance. I find it heartbreaking that although there are numerous recordings of artists that I greatly admire, such as Trane, Wes and Bird, there is very little available of them by way of film and video that I can actually see and share with those of the very visually oriented younger generations, who are curious not just to hear but also see what the fuss was about some of these cats. How I wish that there was more to show of Charlie Parker than that historically important, but now grainy and tired kinescope of Bird and Diz on the Earl Wilson TV show in the early 50’s. My son

is in grade school and just starting to show an interest in all things musical, including jazz; he will often hear an artist that I play and ask me about that person. So when my son heard some of my Oscar Peterson albums and asked about the identity of the piano player, it was a joy to be able to pop in a DVD like this one and show him this great musician, at his best. As a fan, history buff and teacher, I am grateful to companies like Germany’s Inakustik, who are releasing some of these golden performances, preserved with visual and sonic clarity, which will stand as glorious evidence of true art.

The concert presented here was recorded in Berlin, in June of 1985, so the Peterson here is a mature, but still very vital Oscar, a few years prior to the 1993 stroke that diminished some of the dexterity in his powerful left hand. He is joined in the trio by two of his longtime cohorts, drummer Martin Drew and the late Niels-Henning Oersted Pederson on bass (another good reason to pick up this set). While the picture is very sharp and the audio first rate, the presentation itself is a bit no frills. There are no DVD “extras.” On the main menu, you may choose to view the entire 80 minute concert, uninterrupted or you may select to skip ahead and begin the presentation at any of the ten tracks. You also have the option of adjusting the audio experience to fit your sound system (Stereo PCM; 5.1 Dolby Digital or 5.1 dts). So, if you are someone who looks for behind the scenes interviews, hidden tracks and additional info from your DVDs you won’t find it here. However, if you are like me, someone who looks

for top notch performances, good picture and clean audio, you will get plenty of that.

The music is classic Peterson, as the trio rips through standards and a few Oscar originals, such as “Nigerian Marketplace” and “Cakewalk.” The shot selection is excellent as the director keeps a nice balance between close-ups of Peterson and his jaw-dropping fleet fingers and shots of Drew and Pedersen and also of the entire trio. Audience reaction shots are kept to a minimum, which is fine considering the fact that Oscar Peterson’s playing is not just an aural experience, but very much a visual one as well. Musically, these guys had played together so long by the time this was recorded that they clearly could finish each others sneezes and it’s great to be able to see how much they and the crowd at Philharmonie Berlin are enjoying each other. The best musical selections are an exhilarating “Yours is My Heart Alone,” in which Peterson’s hands become a literal blur on the piano keys and “Falling In Love with La Belle Province” (Falling in Love With Love), a bright swinger, which finds the leader quoting from “Pick Yourself Up” and other tunes. It is also a great opportunity to watch Pedersen, as he solos and realize how much he is missed. Actually, to pick favorites in this set is a bit of a useless exercise as there is not a week selection in the bunch and the eighty minute running time, goes by more like eight.

Jazz seems to be playing a little catch-up when it comes to the DVD. Much of the product available is of poor quality, is very expensive, or both. So it is encouraging when you see a reasonably priced product like this (it sells for around \$20.), that is of great quality and features a legendary artist at his best. I only hope that Inakustik and other distributors, domestic and foreign, will scour their vaults for more high quality releases like this. It would go a long way towards literally showing so many, what is really great about jazz.