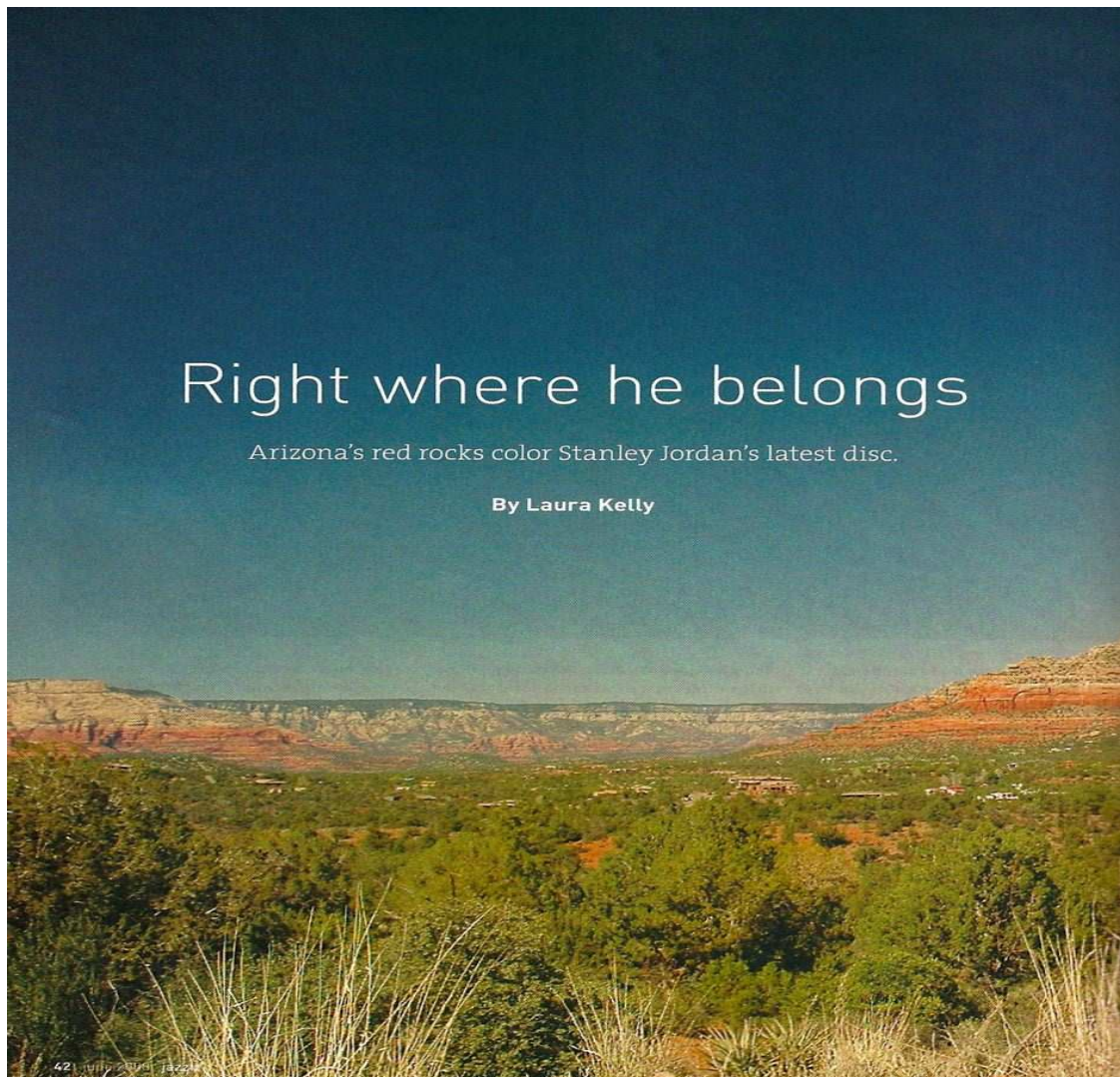
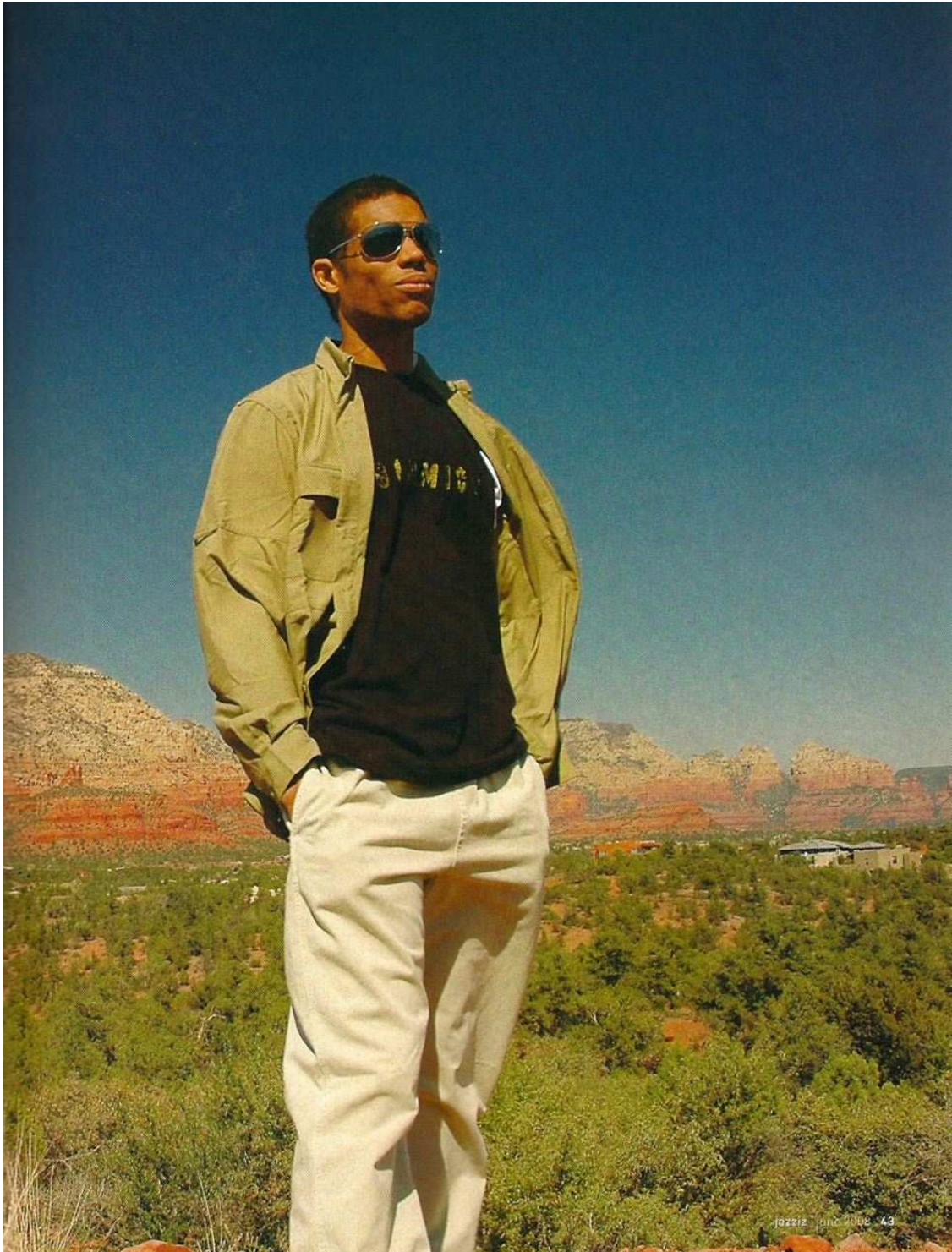
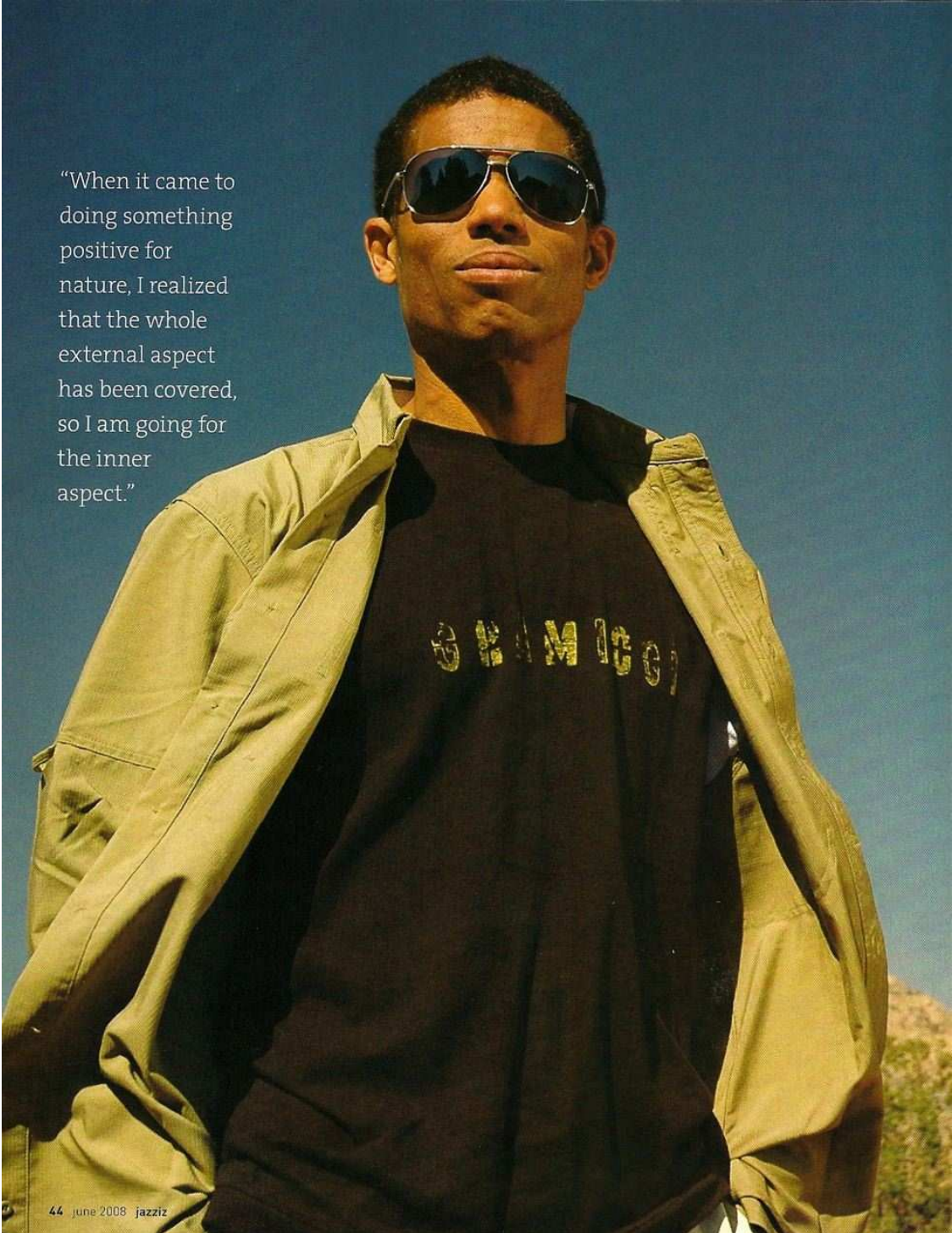




Stanley Jordan's New CD, *State Of Nature* now available at retail & online!





A photograph of a man with short dark hair, wearing dark sunglasses and a light-colored jacket over a dark t-shirt. The t-shirt has the word "GRAND" printed on it in a stylized font. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is a clear blue sky with a hint of a landscape at the bottom right.

“When it came to doing something positive for nature, I realized that the whole external aspect has been covered, so I am going for the inner aspect.”

#### THE RED ROCK MONOLITHS OF SEDONA,

Arizona, stand beneath a cloudless blue sky, creating an epic — and fitting — backdrop for jazz guitarist Stanley Jordan to muse about *State of Nature*, his first mainstream release in 14 years, one he calls an “instrumental concept album.” *State of Nature*, as Jordan sees it, is the yang that conceptually couples with the yin of *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore’s Academy Award-winning documentary about global warming and our interconnection with the natural world.

“The idea of the album developed gradually,” says the 49-year-old musician from a park bench overlooking his adopted hometown. “As I was working on it, I came to understand that I wanted it to be about our relationship to nature and what we can change on the inside to heal that relationship.” Jordan pauses and gathers his thoughts. He’s well-spoken, poised, and clearly animated by the inquiry that infuses *State of Nature*.

“I always felt like I wanted to contribute something,” he says. “I wanted that with my music. On a very basic level this place inspires me; I’ve always been inspired by nature.” He gestures toward the towers of red sandstone formations that incandescence in the afternoon Arizona sunlight. “When it came to doing something positive for nature, I realized that the whole external aspect has been covered, so I am going for the inner aspect.

“I’m not going to talk about gas mileage or carbon footprints. I’m going about it by asking questions: How do we see ourselves? How do we see the world we live in? What kind of thinking messes us up? What kind of thinking do we want to have instead? That’s where this album comes from. We’ve always known we need to live in harmony with nature. The ideas aren’t groundbreaking news.”

Ground may not have been broken, but Jordan explores new terrain on *State of Nature*. He says he’s trying to gently nudge people with a message and powerful music. He penned nine of the 14 tracks, and his daughter Julia, a Los Angeles-based guitarist, sings background vocals. Additionally, Jordan laced several compositions with natural sounds he collected — birdsong, ocean waves, wind. But the largest leap outside of his comfort zone was his return to the piano, the instrument he began playing at 6 and continued studying until he discovered the guitar at age 11.

“I don’t have the same training on piano,” Jordan explains. “I realized that by avoiding the piano, I was actually doing a disservice to my music. I was buying into this idea that I am a guitar player and that is all that I do. It led me

down this weird alley of figuring out how to play the guitar like a piano, which is basically impossible. But I think I’ve figured out how to do it as best as it can be done,” he says, laughing deeply.

“When I went back to the piano, I discovered a few things. I am actually a better piano player than I thought; I just wasn’t giving myself a chance. The other thing is that it freed me up as a guitar player. When I didn’t have to play the guitar like a piano, I could play the guitar like a guitar.”

Playing the guitar like a guitar is the antithesis of Stanley Jordan’s musical reputation. After graduating from Princeton with a music theory and composition degree in 1981, Jordan lived the cliché of artists throughout the country: He moved to New York City and began playing on the streets, hoping to be discovered. Unlike the thousands who never made it beyond the pavement and coffee houses, Jordan got noticed.

In 1985 Jordan was propelled onto the national music scene with the release of *Magic Touch* on the Blue Note label. He was young, good-looking, and undeniably talented. And he had a hook. On the album he deployed the signature style that had won him a soloist competition at the Reno International Jazz Festival when he was 17 — the touch technique — wherein both hands play independently, tapping or touching on the fret board, instead of the usual strumming or plucking. Hammering the strings against the fret board causes it to vibrate and releases the sound. This technique allows the guitarist to play both melody and chords simultaneously — and in Jordan’s case to play two guitars at a time. As he writes in the essay “Getting Started with the Touch Technique” on his website, [www.stanleyjordan.com](http://www.stanleyjordan.com), “Mastering its awesome and unexpected possibilities is another matter. It gives you a level of musical and orchestral complexity previously possible only on keyboard instruments. With a band, you can use your hands together to play leads with undreamed-of speed and agility.” A YouTube clip captures his tapping technique clearly, as an amateur video shows Jordan playing a deft and fluid interpretation of the Beatles’ classic “Eleanor Rigby.”

Jordan didn’t pioneer the touch technique. He credits the first documented performance to Jimmy Walker during the 1950s. But in ’85, when *Magic Touch* hit the market, it netted him a Grammy nominee as Best New Artist. The album went gold and sat atop *Billboard’s* jazz charts for one week shy of a year. Jordan was on the map as the premier touch guitarist. He had finessed the technique. He owned it. Or perhaps, it owned him.

Building on the popularity and national attention of *Magic Touch*, Jordan did the talk-show

**Stanley Jordan**  
*State of Nature*  
(Mack Avenue)

Ten years after the release of his 1985 breakthrough album, *Magic Touch*, guitarist Stanley Jordan moved to Sedona, Arizona, where he still resides. Seeking more



than a change of scenery, Jordan hoped to ease a decade of increasing frustration with the music industry. Since his 1994 album *Bolero*, Jordan has only made guest-recording appearances and released solo material through his Web site — until now. *State of Nature* ends his 14-year major-label hiatus.

The 14-song, 77-minute disc does what Jordan wanted to do, but couldn't, on other labels: go in several different directions. There are traces of the tapping technique that earned him fame on *Magic Touch* but also several originals ("Forest Garden," "Ocean Breeze," "Healing Waves") that show Jordan's interests in both nature and music therapy.

Jordan reunites his old touring rhythm section of bassist Charnett Moffett and drummer Kenwood Dennard for three "Mind Games" interludes. Elsewhere he performs a dazzling solo version of "Mozart's Piano Concerto #21 (Andante in F Major)" and showcases his current Brazilian touring band — with bassist Dudu Lima and drummer Ivan Conti — on Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Insensatez."

But the high points arrive when Jordan shows his true colors as a frustrated pianist — the reason he started tapping the guitar in the first place. "Shadow Dance" showcases his piano playing first, with both piano and guitar overdubbed. Backed by Moffett and drummer David Haynes on Miles Davis' "All Blues" and Horace Silver's "Song For My Father," Jordan takes it one unthinkable step further, playing simultaneous guitar with his left hand and piano with his right. The previously reclusive guitarist closes the CD by overdubbing electric piano on Joe Jackson's appropriately titled "Steppin' Out." — **Bill Meredith**

circuit, showing up on *The Tonight Show* and *Late Night With David Letterman*. He also ventured onto celluloid with a cameo performance in the 1987 Blake Edwards film *Blind Date*. But instead of remaining within the musical niche he had established on *Magic Touch*, Jordan ventured. He experimented. He diversified. His extensive discography dips into rock, pop, groove, African and Latin rhythms, collaborations with a sitar player, and a recent album called *Relaxing Music for Difficult Situations*, a collection of tunes for music therapy, one of Jordan's interests.

Some have found Jordan's decisions inscrutable. "Since then [his last Blue Note release, in 1986], his career has been surprisingly aimless. Stanley Jordan can play amazing jazz but he often wastes his talent on lesser material," wrote jazz critic Scott Yanow on [www.allmusic.com](http://www.allmusic.com). Press material from his current label, Mack Avenue, explains his trajectory differently. "Frustrated with the demands of the commercial music industry, among other things, Jordan went into a self-imposed exile from the rat race in the '90s that included a retreat to the mountains of the Southwest."

"Even though I don't use the word 'exile,'" Jordan says, "I can understand why some people use it when they talk about how I moved here to Sedona. What I find is that there is openness in the West that I like. The land suggests it. I wanted to be in a more relaxed place, be closer to nature, and have more quiet. I've definitely found it here. There's a belief that when you're a musician, you're supposed to want to be rich and famous. I've never been like that. Everything is so formatted in the music industry. I am just all over the map; I have so many interests. But I see now how all the stuff I am doing is related and interrelated. I couldn't explain the connections before."

As Jordan articulates his choices and his influences, he cites R. Buckminster Fuller, a 20th-century inventor and philosopher whom Jordan calls "one of my biggest intellectual heroes." It was Fuller who once said: "How often I have found where I should be going only by setting out for somewhere else." One man's aimlessness may be another man's well-considered path.

In Sedona, Jordan says he's found a receptive place to fuse and pursue his interests: music therapy, teaching, tour-

ing, composing, and deep examination of the interplay between humanity and the natural world. He's currently pursuing a music-therapy degree from Arizona State University and has been a spokesperson for the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) since 2001. Music therapy recognizes the power of music to heal and encourage changes that are non-musical, such as stress reduction, pain relief, cognitive development, and improvement of motor skills.

On his website Jordan writes about stumbling into the effects of music therapy when he was a teen and of pursuing it now through his studies, his personal appearances promoting the AMTA, and through the music he's made for music therapists. "Good music touches us in depths we didn't even know we had," he writes. "In this way it is tied to our growth and evolution, both emotionally and spiritually."

On *State of Nature* Jordan says he's after the idea of music as a means to promote growth and change. "Forest Garden," a melancholy, contemplative song, opens with a cello and gentle guitar notes overlaid onto birdsong. "We need to remember where we are and who we are. We are the caretakers of the garden," Jordan writes about the song in the liner notes. He explains that "Shadow Dance" — a seven-minute song with guitar and piano overdubbed — is about the difficulties that sometimes happen when you try to change. On "Ocean Breeze," a dreamy paean to the sea, Jay Kishor's sitar twings a call and response with Jordan's guitar, played conventionally with a pick. A soft metronome of ocean waves colors the background of "Healing Waves," accompanied by Jordan on piano and Meta Weiss on cello.

"Even though this album is not a music-healing project per se — I mean it is an artistic music project — on a deeper level there is a healing aspect to it. The reason I say that is because if it has any kind of effect at all, it will change how we look at ourselves or at least get us into thinking how we look at ourselves. With the whole convenience of staying in our comfort zone, we are not doing ourselves a favor.

"To make this album I had to get out of my comfort zone. This is the message: We have to get out of our comfort zone. And if we do, we will see that, yeah, there are challenges, but there are gifts and surprises." ▲