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Mike Stern Band: Paris Concert Blu-ray
 in-akustik | 2008 | 112 mins | Not rated | Jun 22, 2009



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Video
 Video codec: VC-1
 Video resolution: 1080i
 Aspect ratio: 1.78:1

Audio
 Music: DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1
 Music: LPCM 5.1
 Music: Dolby Digital 2.0

Subtitles
 None

Disc
 25GB Blu-ray Disc

Price
 List price: \$24.95
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B	B	B	B	B	B
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 3.5
 Video

B	B	B	B	B	B
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 4.0
 Audio

B	B	B	B	B	B
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 4.5
 Extras

B	B	B	B	B	B
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 n/a
 Overall

B	B	B	B	B	B
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3.5

Playback
 Region A (B, C untested)

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Mike Stern Band: Paris Concert Blu-ray Review
 Mike Stern automatically wins the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon award: he's Kyra Sedgwick's half brother. But he also deserves accolades for his superb guitar work.
 Reviewed by Jeffrey Kauffman, February 6, 2010

I've had the pleasure of knowing and working with a number of very fine, highly regarded jazz guitarists through the years, including one especially stellar player who is a *Downbeat* poll winner and has released scads of albums with a who's who list of jazz greats over a very long career, several of which have attained near legendary status, at least in the insular world of jazz. I won't embarrass this gentleman by naming him, but I well remember hearing him call many jazz clubs for hours throughout the United States as he tried to arrange a tour for himself. He was relentlessly cheerful despite the sometimes anemic response of the club owners and I finally asked him how he could stand it. "Well, in the world of jazz guitar," he said calmly, "there's Pat Metheny, and then there's everybody else." I half wonder if that same sort of artistic chauvinism greets someone of Mike Stern's reputation. Probably nowhere near the semi-household name status of Metheny, Stern, like my friend, has decades of collaborations with greats on his resume, notably a stint with the Miles Davis band, and he has continued to be one of the progenitors of the post-1980's jazz-rock fusion scene. Paris' New Morning club finds Mike and his band, including fantastic tenor saxman Bob Franceschini, bassist Tom Kennedy and drummer Dave Weckl, both tearing it up in some neo-Bop excursions and then alternately laying back for some nicely lyrical, quieter pieces.

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Mike Stern

Stern first came to my attention decades ago when he showed up on the reconstituted Blood, Sweat and Tears. Though BS&T had, of course, started out as an Al Kooper enterprise, it wasn't until the second iteration with David Clayton-Thomas that the band really hit the big time. In fact few pop music historians probably even remember anymore that BS&T was the *big* rockin' brass band in the late 1960's and early 1970's, while that little aggregation called Chicago (actually Chicago Transit Authority in its early years) was still trying to gain a chart foothold. But after Clayton-Thomas left, Blood, Sweat & Tears drifted into pop chart irrelevance, and by the time Stern joined the band, its hit making days were largely over. The band nonetheless introduced Stern to a wider audience, though his guitar was largely hemmed in by the pop-jazz conventions of a more traditional format. Stern really got the chance to start stretching out in his next high profile assignment with Billy Cobham's fusion troupe. Soon relatively long term engagements with Miles Davis and Jaco Pastorius followed, and starting in the 1980's Stern's catalog of solo recordings started appearing.

This May 2008 live performance begins with Stern and group ripping through a bop inflected "Tumble Home." This high energy piece perfectly exploits the quicksilver tandem playing of Stern and saxophonist Franceschini, while Weckl's facile drumming and Kennedy's neatly punctuating bass help punch the rhythm seemingly right through the craniums of the adoring crowd. Although there are several such pieces on this set (notably "Chromazone"), this isn't just a bop-fest, as Stern and band ably prove on such laid back tunes as "KT" and the lovely "Wing and a Prayer." On "KT," Stern coaxes almost whale or dolphin like tones out of his guitar with the help of an Echoplex, and the result is both strange and compelling.

While Stern is a nimble soloist and is obviously having a ball, this set belongs largely to Franceschini. When Franceschini starts tearing through riffs on his sax, the electricity factor is upped immeasurably. With a deep throated growl, his playing is both robust and surprisingly nuanced, and when he calms down for the more lyrical moments, he offers a beautiful liquid and mellow sound from his horn. The musical interplay between Franceschini and Stern is also very enjoyable. Though they don't really trade fours or eights in the traditional manner, their dialogues, often overlapping or even in unison, reveal a strong communication factor. I was also repeatedly impressed with Weckl's surefooted bass drum work, which consistently accented off-beat sixteenth notes in some of the faster pieces.

There were a couple of disturbing moments in this concert video in terms of the audience. It's never a good sign to see someone on their cellphone when brilliant music is being played, and someone evidently didn't want to buy this Blu-ray, because you see him using his cellcam for a low-res version of the concert. On the whole, though, the audience is obviously deeply appreciative of these master musicians and seem to be enjoying the tunes on both an intellectual and more viscerally physical level.

It may well indeed be true that Pat Metheny is the unimpeachable Everest of the jazz guitar community, but as two recent New Morning concerts I've reviewed, Stanley Jordan's and this one with Mike Stern, prove, there are any number of incredibly talented purveyors of very fine jazz who deserve to be heard. Stern is certainly one of the finest, most accomplished jazz-rock guitarists working and this concert shows the variety of his playing with a set comprised of some longer form selections that really allow him to stretch out and make the most of the musical geography.

Stern's setlist is:

Tumble Home
 KT
 Wishing Well
 What Might Have Been
 Chatter
 That's All It Is
 Wing and a Prayer
 Chromazone

Video **BBBBB**

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Mike Stern Band's VC-1 encoded 1080i image exhibits both the pluses and minuses that have been boon and bane to previous in-Akustik New Morning concert releases. There's an unappealing softness to a lot of the midrange material, hampered by a dark stage that isn't helped by less than stellar contrast at those ranges. Conversely, close-ups can be quite amazing and full of abundant detail. A low shot up toward Stern's backlit head will offer the viewer ample opportunity to count every staticy hair on Stern's head, and astute viewers will also be able to notice some slight fingerprint smudges on Franceschini's otherwise gleaming sax. Since my hunch is most prospective buyers of this title are probably coming for the music more than the imagery, this intermittently less than overwhelming video quality may not be a real issue, but forewarned is forearmed.

Audio **B B B B B**



As in the very similar Stanley Jordan Trio in-Akustik New Morning title I recently reviewed for [Blu-ray.com](http://www.blu-ray.com), we're offered two excellent 5.1 mixes, a DTS-HD MA and an LPCM, as well as a compressed Dolby Digital 2.0 (why bother, I know some of you have been asking). As I mentioned in the Jordan review, I am somewhat surprised to report a subtle yet noticeable difference between the DTS and LPCM offerings. While both are excellently clear and precise, the LPCM is noticeably beefier on the low end of things. That said the DTS-HD MA on this particular offering has better highs. These are rather picayune concerns, to be fair, and some listeners may not perceive a difference at all. Both of the 5.1 tracks present the music brilliantly, with no aural anomalies or trouble spots to report. I'm also pleased to say that this particular DD 2.0 offering is really amazingly robust. I was actually a little shocked to hear how good this 2.0 folddown sounded, especially compared with some of its more anemic 2.0 siblings on other in-Akustik releases.

Supplements **B B B B B**



No supplements are offered on this particular New Morning Blu-ray, rather odd in that the concert itself only runs about an hour and forty minutes.

Final words **B B B B B**



Stern may not be a household name to the music buying public at large, but jazz lovers certainly know who he is, and for good reason. This is another solid offering in the New Morning concert series and jazzheads should enjoy not only Stern but his crackerjack band.

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