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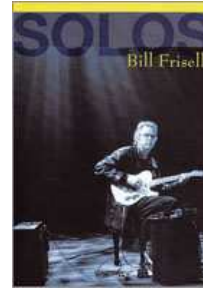
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Bill Frisell

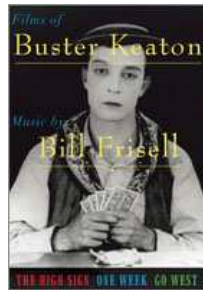
Solos

Music For the Films of Buster Keaton: Go West/The High Sign/One Week
(Songline/Tone Field)

Guitarist Bill Frisell's work as an improviser and composer is refreshingly difficult to pigeonhole, as is his taste in music. In a brief interview snippet on *Solos*, one of two new DVDs documenting his unique artistry, Frisell states, "How could you say that Segovia is more advanced than Robert Johnson or Jimi Hendrix or Wes Montgomery?" Frisell's musical heroes may cover a wide range of musical traditions, but his own work is anything but cut-and-paste eclecticism. His painstakingly nuanced touch and discreetly creative use of loops are instantly identifiable as his own: Frisell is a true American original.



The ten performances on *Solos* were recorded in 2004 at Toronto's Berkeley Church. The visuals on this HD video are competent, but the 5.1 surround sound audio is simply stunning, even when heard on an old fashioned 2-channel stereo like mine. The program includes both melodic originals ("Keep Your Eyes Open," "Ron Carter," "Poem for Eva") and items from his "Americana" songbook (Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," the traditional tune "Wildwood Flower"). Frisell's style is typified by an absolute clarity of line and resonantly warm sound. His unrushed performances scrupulously detail the beauty of every melody in interpretations that judiciously integrate sonic abstractions and the occasional crunchy passage.



In the early 1990s, Frisell composed new scores for six films by Buster Keaton, another true American original. Three of these works were released on Nonesuch Records back in 1995. The newly issued DVD reunites Frisell's music with its original source of inspiration: three masterpieces by this cinematic pioneer. Frisell's music is performed by a trio including bassist Kermit Driscoll and drummer Joey Baron, who superbly executes parts that are synchronous to the action while retaining the loose feel of improvised music.

The two shorts (*One Week* and *The High Sign*) are non-stop barrages of visually brilliant and perfectly executed gags. Here, Frisell's compositions disappoint because they are not in tune with these films' sustained hilarity. The combination of music and image is considerably more successful for the feature, *Go West*, which accents Keaton's pathos as much as it does his humor. Frisell's suitably surreal music for Keaton's unforgettable finale of a cattle stampede through Los Angeles didn't make me laugh, though, and provided the only letdown in this otherwise thoroughly enjoyable and successful experiment in film scoring. —Cliff Preiss