

## **Review "Open Up"**

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Jeff Barone is big! Big range! Big sound! Big fun! He can swing and bop with the best of the hipsters or play passionately soft with the best of the mellow moodsters. His heady musicality is enhanced here by a big sound band of brass and woodwind, the eccentricities of jazz organ as well as the polished and professional abilities of Jack Wilkins, who knows the moves of both a solo guitarist and an accompanist.

Here's some mellow music beyond mere mood music, though what's wrong with moods? What goes beyond moods here, however, is musicianship. These merry men know their measures and take them with courage and conviction. Barone's guitars (electric and nylon string) lead the band, joined by consummate sideman, studio guitar stalwart, and, on this project, co-producer Jack Wilkins, on "Jenna's Song" (a Barone composition) and "Quiet Now." Barone's other original featured compositions are "Duban's Groove", "New Samba" and the title track, "Open Up."

It's only proper that notice should be taken first of the Barone/Wilkins duets found stippled through the selections because both the songs and the guitarists are the shiniest of stars. "Jenna's Song," written for Barone's Daughter was inspired by Wilkins and Chopin, whose "Nocturne No. 2 in E flat major" is the basis for the opening bars of Barone's tune. Wilkins joins Barone in a beautiful 4/4 take on the nocturne's harmonic progression. "Quiet Now" demonstrates again with clarion presence the efficacy and heavenly compatibility of two guitars, open fire or not. Here the two soloists are as kindred as any six-string kin can be, calling, responding, stating, reciprocation. Lovely work it is.

Barone may be best known in and around New York and as a new voice on the music scene nationally; however, "Open Up" will no doubt establish his prominence for wider audiences as an

intelligent theorist and sensitive interpreter who conveys that music must go much beyond technique and technicalities to open-up all the mysteries of the spirit.

The big-sound tunes include the title track tune composed by Barone, as well as the opener, "Duban's Groove." In both tracks, Barone is rightfully just one of the band, relinquishing any gluttonous grabbing of prominence for just fitting in, merging with the out-front trumpet of Magnarelli, the resonant reed of Mike Dubaniewicz, the magic fingers of Ron Oswanski, and the vibrant drumming of Rudy Petschauer. When Barone does take a solo he does so with great presence and command, opening up, as it were, the entire ensemble and bringing it special focus.

Much of the spirit opened up here depends on the special sounds of nylon-string guitar and the B-3 organ of Oswanski and the trumpet of Joe Magnarelli. "If You Go Away" is a stand-out example of the soft, "Jenna's Song" provides the occasion for an exceptional guitar duet with Jack Wilkins who is no stranger to guitar duets as many of his previous recordings evidence his work with other guitarists.

In the instance of the lullaby, "Jenna's Song," the virtuosity of both players is startling. Joe Pass was an early influence on Barone and that imprint is apparent here. A more beautiful collaboration than Barone and Wilkins and the blending of their beautiful tones would be hard to find. In similar fashion "Quiet Now" features Barone and Wilkins in tandem, again inviting, as they say, the softness of quiet nights, quiet stars, and quiet guitars. The Herbie Hancock tune, "Toys," is, in effect, a guitar/trumpet duet with plenty of tremolo and octave playing on Barone's part, and a bluesy, Miles Davis like quality to Magnarelli's trumpet with more than one allusion to "Yesterdays."

Barone demonstrates his impressive abilities as a solo guitarist with his melody soloing and prominent bass lines punctuated by stabbing, emphatic chords. Short track. Sweet sounds.

"Falling in Love with Love" (a two-track bonus) is a fine, swinging opening up by Barone, demonstrating that fresh and comparatively young as he is, he's arrived as a major jazz voice. And again, this rendering proves the compatibility of B-3 organ and electric guitarist. Oswanski's solo is super-sized, another big match to Barone's bigness. All of the musicians here are in the same class, which is highest high class.

Nothing simple about simplicity as Barone and Oswanski demonstrate. Much the same can be said for the group's swinging out and opening up full bore on "I Hear Music" where Barone establishes his command early on, leading the way for Dubaniewicz's sax solo, posted long the way by Barone's comping, and scaled by unison playing of guitar and sax. Perhaps the most obviously arranged track of them all, there's not a false start or ending anywhere along the line.

"Here's That Rainy Day" is interpreted here as a Latin ballad featuring Barone's accommodating nylon-stringed guitar in a rubato introduction which sets the mood for the entrance of Magnarelli's romantic trumpet tones which in turn relinquish the way for Barone's impressive solo, seemingly delivered for effect more with a pick than classical finger style. After trading solos both musicians rejoin, bringing full circle the opening, underscored by Barone's bell-ringing harmonics, reinforcing the lyrics of the tune.

No doubt about it. Big Barone is one heck of a big guitarist -- a mellow, swinging fellow indeed -- opening up new avenues for his career and for the listener!