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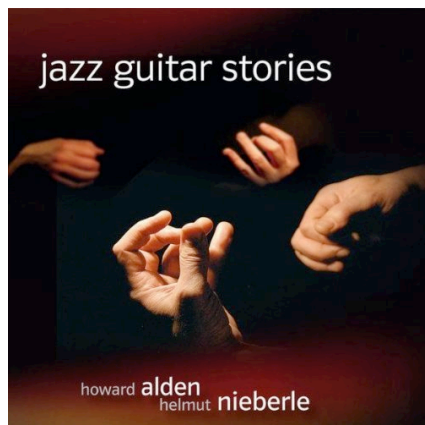
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Jazz Guitar Stories

Howard Alden and Helmut Nieberle

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This handsomely packaged collection showcases two seven-string masters, Howard Alden and Helmut Nieberle. This is an album full of engaging, sophisticated, yet accessible musical conversations. And throughout, you'll hear an underlying homage to the peerless George Van Eps, as well as unabashed and respectful nods to the players' shared influences: Barney, Django and Charlie, Jimmy Wyble, Carl Kress and no doubt others. One of my faves is a very hip, "Waltz for George," a Jimmy Wyble etude dedicated to Van Eps. Wyble used to honor those he admired with musical portraits. And it's a perfect example of citing guitar's lineage and how virtually every player comes from other players. In a sense, that's the gist of this terrific CD.

We're also treated to, "Sarong Number," a moody Carl Kress/Tony Mottola number. Another Kress tune, "Golden Retriever Poppy Dog Blues," is a crisp little tune that elicits snappy solos and spirited rhythm; the kind of thing that automatically evokes a laugh between players after they've brought it home.

Tune choices are what you'd expect from players of this caliber. Five are originals by Nieberle who, in addition to his playing prowess, flexes excellent compositional chops. And are there any superlatives left to describe Howard Alden? His *sui generis* and protean talent places him in any music hall of fame.

Other highlights include "No Moon at All," Barney Kessel's languid "Mermaid," and the interplay on Jimmy Van Heusen's eternal "Here's that Rainy Day," While this album is great listening for anyone, it was no doubt produced for guitarists. It's high musical art and a splendid addition your library. Highly recommended.

Reviewed by Jim Carlton