



KEYBOARD WIZARD JEFF LORBER AND GUITAR HERO MIKE STERN JOIN FORCES ON POTENT NEW COLLABORATION



Concord Jazz set to release *Eleven* on September 27, 2019

For Immediate Release – GRAMMY Award-winning keyboardist/composer/producer **Jeff Lorber** recalls seeing guitarist **Mike Stern** during his much-ballyhooed tenure with Miles Davis in the early ‘80s. “I’ve been a fan of his for a long time,” said the keyboardist, who was touring hard in support of his hit records *Wizard Island* and *It’s a Fact* in those analog days. “Jeff Lorber Fusion and Miles Davis were playing some of the same festivals back then, so I got to hear him play.” For his part, Stern offered, “To be honest, I was aware of him, and had heard a bunch of good things, but I had never really checked him out. We were just in different orbits, me and Jeff.”

In subsequent years, each staked out his respective musical territory — Lorber, the electric maestro from Los Angeles, pioneering the post-fusion sound of contemporary jazz with his radio-friendly, groove-oriented instrumental music; Stern, the esteemed six-stringer from New York, lending his considerable chops to bands led by Jaco Pastorius, Michael Brecker and Joe Henderson as well as groups like Steps Ahead, Vital Information and the Brecker Brothers while also leading his own band and cutting 18 recordings under his own name.

Credit bassist-producer Jimmy Haslip, a charter member of Yellowjackets, with bringing these two seemingly disparate musical forces from opposite sides of the country together. And rather than being a musical Odd Couple, it turns out that Lorber and Stern fit hand-in-glove on the ten scintillating tracks that comprise *Eleven*, set for release on September 27, 2019 via Concord Jazz. (The title is a joking reference to *This Is Spinal Tap*’s Nigel Tufnel, who proudly demonstrates in the 1984 movie how his amplifier has a volume knob that goes to eleven... “for when you need that extra push over the cliff.”)

Haslip was already well acquainted with Stern’s playing, having recruited him for the Yellowjacket’s 2008 album, *Lifecycle*, and follow up two-year tour. The bassist had also cultivated a longstanding musical relationship with Lorber, having played on and co-produced six of the keyboardist’s previous albums — 2010’s *Now Is the Time*, 2011’s *Galaxy*, 2013’s *Hacienda*, 2015’s *Step It Up*, 2017’s Grammy-winning *Prototype* and 2018’s *Impact*. Sensing a natural blend between the two, Haslip proposed the collaboration. “Jeff and Mike both admired each other’s musicianship and talent,” he said. “As far as my conception for this collaboration, I thought working together would create something new and different, which was compelling to me.”

“I was definitely very enthusiastic about it because I knew it would be something different and challenging,” added Lorber. “And I liked the idea that it would take me away from what some people call ‘smooth jazz,’ which is a moniker that I don’t really love. Because Mike is not that at all. He’s a lot jazzier in terms of his phrasing. He’s just a bebop wizard, he’s got an incredible jazz feeling. And by the same token, he’s got the rock and blues thing covered too. He’s on both sides of the musical spectrum. So when I heard he was up for it, I was delighted to have a chance to work with him in the studio on this project. And I think we really hit it off musically as well as personally.”

Said Stern of his main collaborator on *Eleven*, “When the idea was floated for this project, I asked a bunch of cats who worked with Jeff, like Randy Brecker, Dave Weckl and Bob Franceschini, and they all said, ‘He’s cool, he throws down, he can really get it going.’ And they’re right. Jeff’s got a strong rhythmic groove and he comps and plays beautifully on acoustic piano, Fender Rhodes, and organ. He’s got an especially beautiful touch on the acoustic piano, and I know that he studied with Madame Charloff, an amazingly great teacher in Boston. And I feel like his music really comes more from soul music than smooth jazz. That Philly soul thing is definitely in some of his tunes on this record.”

As for the stigma attached to so-called ‘smooth jazz’, Lorber believes that was more a marketing term than a musical category. “I was doing my music way before there was the term ‘smooth jazz.’” he said. “I guess the Venn diagram of my music intersects with some of those characteristics of smooth jazz, but my music has always been melodic, it’s always been funky and I definitely try to keep an attention to soloing. It represents something more ambitious, more jazzy and more compelling, I hope.”

While Stern and Lorber may differ in their approaches in the studio, they found common ground on *Eleven*. “I like the raw, rough edges of recording live in the studio,” the guitarist maintained. “Jeff does it a different way, and he does it really well. He’s kind of amazing at the kind of more produced, almost pop approach to making a record. There’s a certain kind of clarity to that process that I admire. It’s just a different way of conceptualizing it.” Added the prolific composer-producer, “Mike just loves to play live and his thing builds around that, so we just picked some of his favorite tunes to play live. I wanted to kind of reinvent them and reimagine them, so hopefully we were able to step up and do that. What we did was try to add a modern touch by doing more layering, like with some of the overdubbed horn arrangements that David Mann provided on several tunes. And I think Mike was pretty happy with how they turned out.”

The result is an extremely copacetic session that is a far cry from smooth jazz. There’s too much harmonic meat and aggressive soloing from track to track to fit comfortably in that marketing category. Instead, both Lorber and Stern throw down with a vengeance on *Eleven*. From the melodic and catchy opener, “Righteous,” powered by Gary Novak’s crisp backbeat, Lorber’s signature Fender Rhodes playing and Dave Mann’s tight, East Coast/Brecker Brothers-ish horn arrangement, to Stern’s lyrical, African flavored “Nu Som” and his tender ballad “Tell Me,” to nasty, blues-drenched jams like “Jones Street” and “Slow Change,” this summit meeting percolates with insistent grooves and pulsates with energy and ideas. Stern’s runaway romp “Ha Ha Hotel,” fueled by drummer Dave Weckl’s muscular backbeat and punctuated by Mann’s crisp horn pads, has the guitarist unleashing his fabled ‘chops of doom’ before Lorber erupts on a killing organ solo. Lorber’s ultra-funky “Motor City” and “Big Town” add a swagger to the proceedings. The driving Lorber-Haslip number “Rhumba Pagan,” fueled by drummer Vinnie Colaiuta, features a choir of wordless vocals from Stern, Haslip and Chelsea Maull while Lorber’s intricate 6/8 closer “Runner,” has the keyboardist soloing tastefully on piano and the guitarist cranking his axe to *Eleven*.

“This project was a joy to work on for many reasons, but I most enjoyed the collaborative effort in this work with Jeff and Mike,” said Haslip. “For me, as a co-producer, it was the kind of creative and experimental experience I look forward to. We did try to shake it up, and I think we really succeeded.”

Meanwhile, both Stern and Lorber are looking forward to opening up this material on their upcoming tour together. “The way I’m conceiving this is we’re going to stretch a lot live with much longer solos,” said Stern. “Hell, we’ll probably play two tunes the whole set.” Prior to their European tour, Lorber and Stern will commence their swing through the States in late Fall, beginning with a run at Blues Alley in Washington D.C. Sept. 26-29, then Jazz Alley in Seattle Dec. 3-4, Catalina Jazz Club in Los Angeles Dec. 5-8, Yoshi’s in Oakland Dec. 9-10, the Dosey Doe in The Woodlands, TX on Dec. 14, One World Theater in Austin, TX on Dec. 15 and culminating in a run at Iridium in New York Dec. 16-19.

Eleven is also available for pre-order: https://found.ee/SternLorber_Eleven

TRACK BY TRACK COMMENTS:

“Righteous” — “That’s kind of a modal piece,” said Lorber. “The musical development is not harmonic, particularly, in that same way as it is on many of the other tunes. The action is in some other areas. It’s more melodic and rhythmic. It’s one of those radio-friendly uptempo funky jams that people can enjoy. And Ned Mann did an awesome job with the horn arrangement here. I’ve been working with him for a lot of years now and he’s like a secret weapon on my recordings. Usually when I send him things to put horn arrangements on, I’ll put down some rough ideas about what the horn section should be doing. And he just goes into his little room on 70th Street in Manhattan and he plays like 25 tracks of doubled and tripled flute, alto and tenor saxophones while adding extra brass parts with synthesizers. It’s like magic, and it comes back sounding like a large ensemble.” (Stern enters at the 2-1/2 minute mark on the bridge, floating over the top with warm, liquid tones. Lorber switches to acoustic piano as the two take the tune out on an upbeat note, paced by Dave Weckl’s insistent backbeat.)

“Nu Som” — “That’s one I wrote a while ago but hadn’t ever recorded,” said Stern. “It’s named for Will Lee’s wife, Sandrine Lee. She’s a wonderful photographer and she’s got a book out called “Nudescapes.” That’s her artist name. It’s short for “Nous sommes,” which is “We are” in French. On this song I’m trying to capture the vibe when Sandrine and my wife Leni get together. It’s a fun, very positive vibe when they’re talking, and I thought that tune would really fit that vibe.” Added Lorber, “This tune, to me, is fantastic. I think it’s the one that we’re going to put out as our single to radio. It’s got a beautiful melody, it’s got great changes and Mike plays so great on it. And we also got his wife Leni to play African N’goni on this track.”

“Jones Street” — “When I was working on this album I went back and checked out a lot of Mike’s records,” said Lorber. “And of course, Michael Brecker is featured on a lot of them. That’s like having Babe Ruth batting cleanup in your lineup. I mean, Mike Brecker’s soloing in the middle of your song? You can’t lose. Of course, it’s kind of hard to live up to that but we did our thing. And I think the big difference here is it’s just a little more produced. We were just trying to add a modern touch. And that’s a real tour de force for Mike. He gets to wail with his blues and jazz vibe on that, and I’m just trying to hang on.” Added Stern, “It’s definitely got that live vibe with Weckl on drums. And it was a little more uptempo than the original (from 1997’s *Give And Take*). I wanted to do some different things with this version and when we started playing with Jeff, he got the vibe right away. And he’s some really good organ on that. His main thing is piano and Fender Rhodes, but he plays the shit out of the organ here. So that’s going to be fun playing this tune live.” (Catch Weckl unleashing on an ostinato at the end of this piece).

“Motor City” — “That’s one I had around for a long time and always really liked,” said Lorber. “I think I wrote the first little sketches out for it almost 15 years ago. The original demo that I did back then had these old Yamaha DX7 synthesizer sounds on it, and a couple of them made it through on the final mix. You can hear a couple of them popping through here and there. It’s a fun song with that upbeat vibe that people can enjoy, like ‘Righteous.’ I take an acoustic piano solo here. I just love playing acoustic piano these days. I think as time goes on, I find myself playing more and more acoustic piano and really loving it. I love the Fender Rhodes too, of course, and I have a real Fender Rhodes that I’ve used for years. Those are my two main

instruments — piano and Rhodes. And I definitely use the Mini-Moog in some of the fabric of pieces on this record too.”

“Big Town” — “That was one that I wrote with Jimmy Haslip,” said Lorber. “Jimmy had a little sketch that he put together — the main groove in the song — and I just took it and kind of developed it. I love playing cool changes to lift the song and take it somewhere. I’m always looking for an opportunity to do that.”

“Slow Change” — “That’s another of Mike’s bluesy workouts...a little darker blues with a slower vibe,” said Lorber. “I’m sure that one will be very fun to play live. I’m looking forward to getting a chance to really explore some of this stuff, like this tune.” Added Stern, “That one was on my 2001 album *Voices* and it originally had vocals by Elisabeth Kontomanou. I decided to just do it instrumentally here and it worked out well. For some of this stuff, like on this tune, we just went on the fly in the studio. We sent the music around before the date but we really had no rehearsal. We kind of rehearsed a little bit in the studio before recording and then we just went for it.”

“Tell Me” — “That was one of the hardest songs to do,” said Lorber. “Mike was very particular about how he wanted it, and we just ended up having to go back and forth on it to get it right. At the end of the day, he opted towards making it quite a bit less produced than most of the other things on the record. There’s not a whole lot getting in the way of the melody and basic chords on this one. It’s just build around the strong guitar part.” Added Stern, “Originally (on 1996’s *Between the Lines*), I had Bob Malach by saxophone on this. It’s hard for me to pick my own tunes. I tend to get self-critical, but Leni really liked this one and said we should do it. And when we were running it down in the studio, I asked Jeff to play kind of like Bruce Hornsby, and he totally got it. He knows that world and he’s really such a good musician. So that kind of came out cool. That’s the only ballad on the record, so I was happy with that.”

“Ha Ha Hotel” — “The bluesy vibe that Mike has on that tune inspired me to play organ on this tune,” said Lorber. “The organ is a natural complement to what he’s playing there. It’s got a little bit of insanity with the distortion and the way that melody moves. And it’s quite difficult to play, by the way. So before we went in to record, I worked quite a bit for a couple of weeks before that to get that thing going the best I could. But I know Mike loves playing it live. If you go on YouTube, there’s tons of versions of him playing that tune. So I think it’s one of his favorites.”

Added Stern, “Jeff played a cool organ solo on that when we recorded this live, but then he wanted to make the tune shorter by taking the organ solo out. And I said, ‘No, baby! You can’t do that. It’s just smoking!’” And I put a little wah-wah rhythm guitar thing on there behind his organ solo and he really liked it. That song is 25 years old (originally appearing on 1994’s *Is What It Is*) and we’re reviving it here. And we had Bob Franceschini play with this octave effect his saxophone on that tune. It’s kind of cool and edgy that way, which I like.”

“Rhumba Pagan” — “In preparation for this recording, I got a chance to go see Mike’s show a couple of nights when he was here in Los Angeles,” said Lorber. “He’s got some terrific ballads and he likes to sing on them too. And when I found out that Mike was looking for something that he could sing on, I thought of ‘Rhumba Pagan,’ which is a song Jimmy and I worked on with a friend of his, Edgar Pagan, a bassist out of Rochester, New York. So we worked on this tune together and I just love the way it turned out. It’s a cool number, different than anything on the record. And it’s one that when we play it live it’ll be a nice change of pace in the set.” Added Stern, “Jimmy and I both sing on that one. I’ve been doing more vocals lately and I’ll probably do more singing live with this band. Maybe we’ll do some Hendrix tunes and I’ll sing on ‘Little Wing’ and ‘Foxy Lady.’ That’ll be fun.”

“Runner” — “I love to do stuff in 6/8,” said Lorber. “I love odd time signatures. And once again, it’s another way to change things up and make things interesting for the audience when you play concerts. So that’ll be a

fun one to do live. Mike wails on this tune. He is just so natural with the way he flies over changes and comes up with his very unique and very identifiable sound of how he interprets things. It's occasionally a little outside, but in a nice way. His style of soloing is very unpredictable. And I think that's one thing that people really love about him."

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