

Jazz Guitarist Succeeds Without Sappy Songs

By JEREMY HURTZ
Staff Writer

Pat Metheny's latest album, *Trio 99>00*, relies less on the jazz star's lithe guitar moves and more on his improvisation and innovation. His previous three outings with trios are among his most widely praised, and *Trio* likely will continue the trend.

During the past 25 years, Metheny has refined his supple guitar style. He's capable of evoking many moods — most of them mellow — and has garnered critical praise and commercial success.

After touring with his Pat Metheny Group and recording a redundant guitar-and-symphony soundtrack to "A Map of the World" (both projects lend to mood music), Metheny teamed with bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Bill Stewart for two days to record *Trio*.

These 11 tracks range from up-tempo pieces like the opener "(Go) Get It" to slower, more deliberate songs such as "Travels." While the faster pieces prove consistently listenable, the slower pieces run a wider gamut of quality.

In past recordings, Metheny has displayed an affinity for overly sugary sounds. Though there's not much of that on this record, a couple of songs do stray into elevator-music territory. The simple sentimentality which made *A Map of the World* so pleasant sticks out, in the company of more interesting material, like a sappy thumb. Still, even the worst tracks on *Trio* share a palpable sincerity with the best of his tunes.

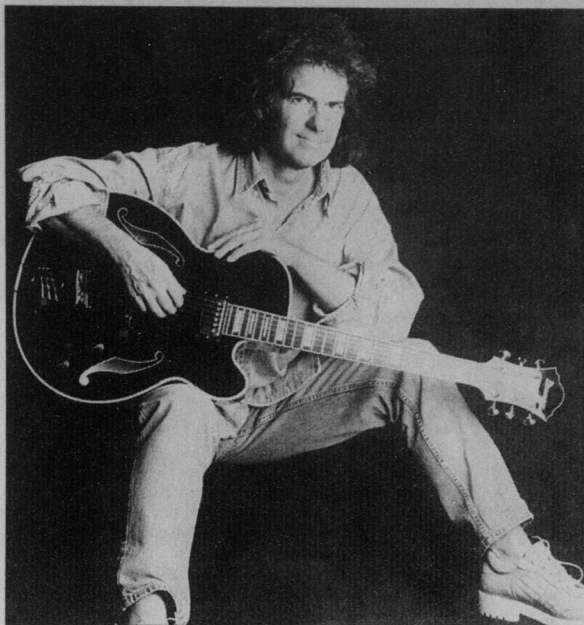
This earnestness makes the album's high points quite affecting. An eerie, thrumming piece called "Just Like the Day" seems simultaneously prayer and chant, a hymn of restrained beauty.

By far the best offering here, "Just Like the Day" is a Metheny original. But *Trio* also boasts three songs not penned by the guitarist, including, bizarrely, a song from the musical "Bye Bye Birdie."

Though he's unquestionably the main attraction, Metheny occasionally drops out of the songs. Grenadier and Stewart shine when given the spotlight, but they know when to relinquish it.

Trio gives ample evidence that Metheny's star won't burn out soon. Despite its flaws, this is the work of a craftsman at the top of his form.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.



Jazz guitarist Pat Metheny substitutes innovation for elevator music on his latest release, the mellow *Trio 99>00*.

Drifting Through Drives Toward Top-40 Success

By ERIN WYNIA
Senior Writer

With roots as a Phish-influenced jam band, Raleigh-based Drifting Through stands poised to take over — G105.

Making the switch from 30-minute-plus jam tunes to a commercial radio format takes talent, and talent shines through on *Spell*, Drifting Through's debut album.

In the grand tradition of N.C. pop-rock bands like Hobex, Cravin' Melon and Far Too Jones, Drifting

Through plays with guts, tenderness, soul and a sense of fun. This combination will undoubtedly provide fodder for the eager hands of top-40 hitmaker G105, whose influence and heavy song rotation has won major-label contracts for local bands in the past.

Drifting Through, for its part, makes no bones about courting commercial success. *Spell*'s tracks play like good old-fashioned Southern rock, with a touch of funk. The music's easy on the ears, but definitely not fluff.

And the man responsible for the band's familiar-yet-fresh sound is Randall Kirsch, Drifting Through's primary songwriter, vocalist and guitarist. Kirsch's lyrics tell stories — tragedies of love and drunkenness — and the instruments simmering underneath wisely

interpret the words.

Therein lies the band's strength.

Music in such an established genre as Southern rock tends to sound recycled, like five guys all trying to relive the glory days of Lynyrd Skynyrd.

But Drifting Through has discovered the secret to resisting that temptation. The band's snazzy jazz-like chord progressions and inventive keyboard work go a long way toward creating a sound that reminds listeners of their roots, yet takes the genre in a different direction.

For instance, on "Hatteras" (a great frat party rock-out), an organ blends with a dizzy bassline, insistent drums and a guitar solo reminiscent of The Allman Brothers. The band rocks, certainly, but never sounds out of control.

Still, perhaps the most tantalizing aspect of *Spell* comes with each track's potential to be transformed into an extended jam in a live setting. Over the past four years, ever since its formation at Wake Forest University, the band has exhibited an unrelenting dedication to touring and the skills refined on the road show in this album.

So for all its commercial trappings, this music yearns to jump out of its skin, and on March 3, the Triangle will get a dose of Drifting Through at The Brewery in Raleigh. Don't miss the opportunity to hear this up-and-coming band, which should do anything but drift through the airwaves this summer.

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British Songstress Won't Take Tunes Past Small Stages

By MATT MANSFIELD
Staff Writer

Feminist singer Sheila Nicholls will tour sedate coffee shops all over the country in upcoming months. And after listening to *Brief Strop*, it doesn't seem possible for her to succeed anywhere other than a corner stage next to the coffee shop.

Her alluring British voice is reminiscent of Beth Orton, whose folk-guitar has graced the Cat's Cradle stage.

But the similarities end there, with Nicholls featuring a piano as her main

instrument, plus some backup violins and guitars.

The music depresses the listener consistently throughout the album. Each song features minimal piano accompaniment, making each note progressively poignant throughout the song.

However, it sounds like Nicholls sat down at the piano and randomly hit some low, somber keys, the way a novice pokes at the piano to mock composition techniques.

Unlike Orton, all of Nicholls' depressing songs sound like carbon copies of the others, which motivate the listener to take some Prozac before playing the whole album.

Her melancholy lyrics about feminist issues complement the maudlin music perfectly. They don't entertain, many of

them digressing on trite generalities like the evils of marketing and the system.

Lyrics about individual female experience pale in comparison to Tori Amos and even Orton. They are real, but they just do not move the listener.

Nicholls does, however, add emotion to the lyrics with her voice effectively. The listener knows that she sings from the heart, and her voice builds up to sonorous high notes with a powerful British accent.

But she wastes her voice on sad lyrics and music, giving her singing a whiny feeling.

Nicholls has potential as a musician, but she needs to emphasize that some things in life are positive. Abortion, broken hearts and ennui might exist in life, but birds and daisies do, too.

One bright spot on the album is "Question." She gets as upbeat as she possibly can, and the piano has a little positive force, getting listeners to prick their ears up and take notice.

But the album just reminds the listener of some overly sentimental folksinger that drones on in coffee shops. And appropriately, that's mostly what her tour consists of.

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