

Sample CD Liner Note (*The Very Best of Larry Carlton, Verve Music Group*)

An interviewer once asked guitarist Larry Carlton if he considered his music to be part of the jazz tradition.

"I personally do," Carlton replied. "People ask me to describe how I play, and the most obvious answer is that I'm a jazz-influenced guitar player. But I'm not a jazz guitar player. Wes Montgomery was a jazz guitarist, Joe Pass was a jazz guitarist."

Carlton's response was typically modest. But as the music on this collection demonstrates, it hardly does justice to his own playing. Over the course of a career that began in the early 1960s, Carlton has masterfully blended pop, blues, and jazz in a way that combines the best of all three. A consummate session player, Carlton has appeared on thousands of recordings, his playing has graced more than 100 gold albums, and he has worked with everyone from Sammy Davis, Jr. and Quincy Jones to John Lennon. He's won a handful of Grammie awards, including Best Jazz Fusion Performance for *Last Nite*, and has been nominated for several more.

Born in Torrance, California, in 1948, Carlton first picked up a guitar at age six. His introduction to jazz came through swing-oriented guitarists and he later gravitated toward the music of more modern players like Montgomery and Pass, to whom "Remembering J.P." was dedicated. By the time he landed his first gig playing at a supper club at the age of 14, he had also become fascinated by the music of saxophonist John Coltrane. The blues, too, played a role in his formative thinking; to this day he remains an ardent fan of the legendary guitarist B.B. King.

Carlton studied music at Los Angeles Harbor College and California State University, and in 1968, he went on tour with The 5th Dimension just as the vocal group was peaking in popularity. Soon after, he became music director of an award-winning children's television program, "Mrs. Alphabet," appearing on screen as "Larry Guitar." By the early '70s, he was one of the busiest studio musicians in Los Angeles.

Carlton was in demand elsewhere, as well. He toured and recorded with the fusion super-group, the Crusaders, and made guest appearances on now-classic albums by artists such as Joni Mitchell and Steely Dan. His playing stood out even then; *Rolling Stone* has called Carlton's solo on Steely Dan's "Kid Charlemagne" one of the three greatest guitar solos in rock history.

The recordings that Carlton made under his own name for MCA and GRP in the 1980s and '90s show the extraordinary range of his talents. It's hard to say what's most impressive about these tracks: Carlton's playing, his arrangements, or his tunes.

"Remembering J.P." shows off Carlton's jazz roots to especially good effect – those authoritative bebop lines firmly contradict his own claim that he's "not a jazz guitar player." The Lennon-McCartney tune "Things We Said Today," meanwhile, is one of the

strongest blues statements in the collection. It is also a testament to Carlton's ability to express his own sensibility through other people's material, a skill he undoubtedly honed during his years as a session player. Everything about this track is perfectly judged, from the deep-in-the-pocket groove established by bassist Melvin Davis and drummer Land Richards, to Carlton's tasteful responses to the lyrics, sung by his wife Michele.

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"Mourning Dove" reveals the electric guitarist's fondness for the acoustic sound of his instrument; you can feel the wood under his strings as he savors his own arcing melody. Carlton's arrangement of this piece bears hints of the doo-wop he listened to as a child: Greg Bissonnette's shuffling drum work, in particular, conjures up memories of an old-fashioned, street-corner ballad.

"Terry T." is a lovely example of pop-jazz fusion that illustrates yet another feat of jazz artistry; Carlton renders the melody (his own, in this case) even more beautiful through subtle melodic embellishments, including the blues inflections which first enthralled him as a teenager.

It would be easy to focus on Carlton's gorgeous tone and inspired soloing. But "Honey Samba," from the Grammy-nominated *On Solid Ground*, reminds us once again of his skills as an arranger and ensemble performer. Carlton adds a hefty dose of distortion to his sound, lending a bold aggressiveness to the lilting tune. Yet he never overwhelms the melody or his own arrangement, which layers guitar, bass, synthesizer, and percussion in an intricate web.

Carlton recently told one jazz journalist that he is concerned with saying more with less, and with making major statements in a basic format. "I've always admired that quality," he said. "Even when John Coltrane was doing his most advanced harmonic thing, you could break his statements down to something elegant, something you could easily hum." This could be said of Carlton himself, who manages to combine the accessibility of pop with the profundity of the blues and the improvisational genius of jazz.