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HRISTO VITCHEV

Emotional Connections

For the first time in his career, Hristo Vitchev went the double-album route for his latest release, an impressionistic extravaganza titled *In Search Of Wonders* (First Orbit Sounds Music). It's a quartet project for the Bulgarian-born guitarist, composer, producer, author, painter and record label owner, who released his leader debut in 2009.

Vitchev, now based in San Francisco, is a man who wears many creative hats and has put them all to good use on this album. "I get inspired, not by music, but by a lot of visuals," said Vitchev, whose paintings have adorned the cover for all seven of his independent releases. "I go to museums and check out a lot of art. Landscapes and scenery really inspire me to write music. I [usually] keep writing until I have nothing more to say. When I wrote the music for this latest album, it ended up being so long that it was not physically possible to include all the music on one CD. It's like a snapshot of one particular moment. It represents where I am at this point."

Vitchev's quartet includes Brazilian pianist Weber Iago (aka Jasnam Daya Singh), who has worked with the leader since 2007; bassist Dan Robbins, who has been in the fold since 2009; and drummer Mike Shannon, who joined the group in 2012.

Iago has fond memories of those early days in 2007 when he and Vitchev were sidemen on other people's projects. "While we were in those situations, it didn't take long for us to recognize the potential of a possible collaboration, but nothing was rushed," said the pianist. "So, not quite two years after our initial encounter, Hristo decided he was ready to record his first album—and, boy, he was right. I was graced

with the invitation to be part of that project, which became *Song For Messambria*."

Since then, Vitchev and Iago have worked together in several configurations—quartet, quintet and duo—and toured around the world. "*In Search Of Wonders* tells a story," Iago said. "All of Hristo's albums do; however, what this one does, in a very organic way, is display his mind and soul as he sets out to experience each note he plays as a thing to be marveled by."

Vitchev is a child of the '80s and initially cut his musical teeth on rock bands like Bon Jovi and Van Halen. When he moved to the States, he truly discovered jazz and hasn't looked back since. "I studied jazz with a piano player and I started applying my piano studies to the guitar," Vitchev explained. "Now, every single tune I write is on the piano. By practicing guitar for so many years, you develop muscle memory. I don't even have to think about it and my fingers start moving. But on piano, I have to really think about it and approach it like an arranger. Logically it expresses better what I want to say."

A major factor in Vitchev's success is his close rapport with his gifted band—a dependable cadre of likeminded individuals who fit his semi-classical and atmospheric compositions like a glove.

"Weber lives in Portland, Oregon, and Mike and Dan live in the central coast of California," Vitchev said. "Many of my colleagues ask why I keep a band that's all over the West Coast. Well, it's because these people get it emotionally from the first note. We don't have to explain anything. My pianist is voicing things perfectly and the rhythm section is grooving. No comments need to be made. This is something very special." —Eric Harabadian



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