

## The Michael Landau Group - Organic Instrumentals (Album Review)



review by Iain P W Robertson

Lyrical bias has always been my musical bag, even though I recognise that stellar guitarmanhood ought to lie behind song-writing genius. Therefore, listening to Michael Landau's latest oeuvre, 'Organic Instrumentals', I could not help but feel that some lyrics ought to be added. As a modestly talented wordsmith, I should like to offer my services (I can perceive the O2 dates already).

Yet, as Landau is commonly regarded as one of the most widely respected session guitarists of an era, his new ten track album does warrant listening to. Personally, I can derive great pleasure from the combined efforts of Steve Howe, Darryl Stuermer, Robert Cray, the remarkable BB King and even the 'new boy on the block', Joe Bonamassa. Landau fits that bill to perfection.

Mind you, he ought to, having recorded or played with artists as diverse as Miles Davis, Seal, Pink Floyd, Mariah Carey, Quincy Jones, Diana Ross, Rod Stewart, James Taylor and Jefferson Airplane. His band, which consists of the drumming talents of Gary Novak, Charley Drayton and Vinny Colaiuta, allied to bassists Chris Chaney and Andy Hess and the flexible fingers of legendary Hammond specialist, Larry Gouldings, can also boast strident CVs from working with many of the world's top musical performers.

As with most guitar breaks, it is not so much the introductions to each of the ten titles in the CD listing but the explosive, soaring strings that occur at some point into each track. The anticipation builds, awaiting the inevitable 'solo' assault, which, it needs to be said, does not arrive on 'Karen Mellow' (05:25; track 5), which is as the musical title suggests and is probably too luxuriantly laid back in any case.

Fortunately, most of the other titles also live up to their names sonically (difficult, without lyrics). Landau strides through the melancholia of opening gambit, 'Delano', makes a minor impact on the second track, 'Sneaker Wave', but really gets the hammer down with the spookily titled and lengthy 'Spider Time' (07:42), which also gives vent to the tightly skinned snare of Gary Novak and the subtly incessant Hammond organ of Larry Gouldings, a sound peppering that is always welcome.

One of the biggest surprises weighs in with 'Big Sur Howl', the seventh track on the CD, which features the flugelhorn of Walt Fowler, in a strongly jazz orientated listing. While there is a distinct southern vibe to 'Smoke' (track 9; 03:32), which almost permeates your nostrils, the complexity and brevity of the final track, 'The Family Tree' (03:09), underscores the brilliance of Landau as a consummate guitar-playing tour de force.

As a collaboration of some of the veterans of the musical scene, possessing a strong blues bias across the work, there is plenty at which to marvel. The sound is as subtle as you want it to be and the melodious nature of many of the phrases and tones chosen is mellifluously charming. You don't have to be a cinema fan to appreciate a great and varied musical backdrop.