



RUSSELL MALONE **Montreal Jazz Festival**

July 2007

Following a short break, Malone took to the stage, launching immediately into a fiery original, “He Said What,” that quickly established his remarkable skill. A mainstream player who has clear precedence in Wes Montgomery, George Benson and, to a limited degree, Pat Martino, Malone remains unique in the world of straight-ahead jazz guitarists. Few jazz guitarists use vibrato, but Malone’s B.B. King-like fast vibrato created a unique combination of blinding technical virtuosity and unexpected physicality.

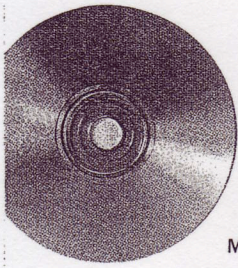
Malone’s quartet has been around for a couple of years and features in-the-pocket bassist Tassili Bond, powerhouse drummer Jonathan Blake and pianist Martin Bejerano, heard recently at the Ottawa International Jazz Festival with drum legend [Roy Haynes](#). The quartet is featured on [Live at Jazz Standard, Vol. 1](#) (MaxJazz, 2006) and the soon-to-be-released follow-up, *Volume Two* (MaxJazz, 2007). While Malone, in one of his engaging introductions, described how each member came to the band, he didn’t have to say what was perfectly clear the moment the group played: that this is a potent band with terrific energy and commitment, an ability to shift feels on a dime, and the broad stylistic scope and supporting skills to play both within and outside the American mainstream tradition.
l:r: Russell Malone, Jonathan Blake

Malone’s technical ability has few peers. Blinding speed aside, he’s capable of the kind of chordal harmonics first introduced by the late Canadian guitarist Lenny Breau, but he’s taken the technique one step further, as demonstrated on his solo intro to “More Than You Know.” And while he sticks mainly with a pick, when he does finger-style picking, as he did on a beautiful intro to “Unchained Melody,” it becomes clear just how much potential yet remains for this gifted player.

With impressive solo after impressive solo—from everyone in the band—there was no question of leaving without an encore. When he asked what the audience wanted to hear and someone yelled out “blues,” Malone and his quartet launched into a booty-shaking barrelhouse blues. Even more in B.B. King mode, Malone adjusted his amplifier so that his normally warm hollow body electric tone was more appropriately sharp and pungent.

His extended solo once again demonstrated the kind of breadth that suggests how, while he may be viewed as the mainstream now, where he'll go in the future is wide open.

- 66 Jazz
- 70 Blues
- 75 Beyond
- 78 Reissues
- 90 Books



Reviews

Masterpiece ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★



Russell Malone

Live At The Jazz Standard

MAXJAZZ 602

★★★½

Russell Malone's unmitigated consistency and settled fluency rarely leave an audience shaken or startled. On the other hand, I have never known him to utter a patently dislikable or illegible phrase. In denying us the extremes of temperament and volatility that tend to draw notice in a crowded field of fine jazz guitarists, Malone has been content to patrol the safe, well-lit avenues of an evenhanded moderation. It's a neighborhood shared by many, from veterans like Herb Ellis to dapper contemporaries such as Howard Alden.

This set, recorded at New York's Jazz Standard with his working rhythm team, is consistent with much of Malone's previous well-dressed work, even reprising Milt Jackson's "Heartstrings" from Malone's Verve CD of the same name from 2001. But on this CD he pushes out a bit, working up more of a fever in places and sometimes getting downright funky.

In turning to the blues before, Malone offered sophisticated and quietly upscale renditions, even on his acoustic version of a warhorse like "St Louis Blues" from his first Columbia album in 1992. Here, however, he tackles the straight "Malone Blues" and uses it as a platform for some voices I hadn't thought were in him. The early chouses are light and jaunty, broken by a few meditative bluesy pauses. Then after a flashy, crowded coda—the kind intended to poke an audience in the ribs a bit—it assumes the position and plants its feet squarely in the grit of barroom r&b.

The temperature starts to rise as Malone uses everything but a wah-wah pedal. Half past the five minute mark, he's so uncharacteristically juiced up he's running up and down the frets like a wild boar before bringing it all in for a safe landing. This Eric Clapton-esque blues-rock has long coalesced into a kind of theater celebrating the outlaw sinner in us, and there isn't much of that in the Malone persona. One is entitled to suppose that there is a certain amount of play-acting here, but the musician in him knows how to layer all the elements smartly, even if it does rub counter to his courtly, well-behaved elegance.

Elsewhere, Malone is more in character, running through a program of nicely crafted, mostly original pieces. Though I don't find in his work a strong singular signature, there is an abundance of accomplishment. He's never at a loss for a riff to drop into a solo. His lines have a relaxed, nothing-to-prove confidence. The occasional quote is so snugly and naturally integrated into the flow—"Lazy Afternoon," for instance, a couple of minutes into "You Should Know Better"—you wonder if Malone even realizes it as he's playing.

—John McDonough

Live At The Jazz Standard: He Said What?; I Saw You Do It; Flirt; Blue Daniel; Mean Streak; Heartstrings; Malone Blues. (62:00)

Personnel: Russell Malone, guitar; Martin Bejerano, piano; Tassili Bond, bass; Jonathan Blake, drums.

Ordering info: maxjazz.com





The New York Times

October 29, 2006

Russell Malone

Mr. Malone, who became visible in jazz around 15 years ago, hasn't tried to re-invent the guitar: in his standard, soft tone you hear Wes Montgomery, George Benson, some B.B. King. But as a performer he maintains a high rate of astonishment, and with traditional materials: his ability to get inside swing rhythms or bruisingly play a narrative blues, causing great tension and then easing off it. On "Live at Jazz Standard Volume One" (MAXJAZZ), he plays a good set with his regular quartet, mostly originals. There are pitfalls - some hyper-busy playing and writing - but two of his blues tunes, "I Saw You Do It" and "Malone Blues," are keepers. "Malone Blues" is an obvious blues, and he gives his guitar sound a trebly, Albert King-ish bite, unusual for him; "I Saw You Do It" is a blues, too, but a covert kind, full of unusual chords strung together by backward sounding phrases leaping across big intervals; but intermittently, he drops the pretense altogether and simplifies, playing with wit and directness.

-Ben Ratliff



Sounds of Timeless Jazz
November 2006

LIVE AT THE JAZZ STANDARD
Russell Malone

LIVE AT THE JAZZ STANDARD marks guitarist Russell Malone's first "live" recording with his acclaimed working band of pianist Martin Bejerano, bassist Tassill Bond, and drummer Johnathan Blake. Their work engages you completely and induces you to participate in Malone's musical conversations as if you are the fifth member of the group. Malone's original composition "He Said What?" opens the seven-song set. They burn for nearly nine minutes with a driving groove and rhythmic versatility. Later in the set, the Frank Rosolino standard, "Blue Daniel," is played as a jazz waltz. It is both lithe and beautiful while "Mean Streak" shows off Malone's blazing fretboard work. The solos on this song are solid sources for any master musician to include in their repertoire. Only a master would be able to perform the dynamic chord changes, outstanding fretboard work and lyrical movement of the piano. The drumming is somewhere between obsessive and driven; the energy level is off the meter. "Heartstrings" is truly a beautiful ballad and Malone plays it with tenderness and sensitivity. His chord choices radiate with sublime emotion and romantic charm. I have seen Russell Malone perform in an array of venues including Big Sur, Playboy Jazz and many others. However this set at the Jazz Standard just may be his best yet. Check it out. Buy LIVE AT THE JAZZ STANDARD now.



ALL ABOUT JAZZ
December 2006

Russell Malone
Live at Jazz Standard (Vol. 1)

Russell Malone played a weeklong engagement at Jazz Standard last month, ostensibly to promote the release of this new album. Malone was backed on both ventures by the solid rhythm section of bassist Tassili Bond, pianist Martin Bejerano and drummer Johnathan Blake. A lyrical, inventive guitarist, you can almost see him thinking out loud on the bandstand and once he's formulated his ideas it's full speed ahead, with dazzling rapid-fire arpeggios and single-note lines punctuated with octaves. He brightened the straightahead "I Saw You Do It" with humorous quotes from "Jeannine" and Branford Marsalis' "The Ballad of Chet Kincaid." "Flirt" was feature on both live sets and Malone displayed a wonderfully light touch on this Asian-tinged ballad.

The sprightly "Blue Daniel" began as a waltz, then shifted into a wiry midtempo groove with lovely solos from Malone, Bejerano and Bond. "Mean Streak," based on the changes of "Fine And Dandy," was an uptempo free-for-all, Malone racing along, playing with daring and coherence, the rhythm section right along with him, driving each other along the process. The lovely rendition of Milt Jackson's "Heartstrings" had a special poignancy because Bags' widow was in the audience. Malone and the quartet, so inspired, play with added tenderness and emotion. The CD ends with the gutbucket crowd pleaser "Malone Blues." When Malone played this at the live show he had as much fun as the audience, switching from bluegrass to blues to funk and launching into a few bars of "Purple Haze" at the end. Also performed were "Sweet Georgia Peach," a jazzy version of the Isley Brothers' "For The Love of You" and "Mugshot." So it seems the recent gig was not only to promote the new CD but present material for another one, something for Malone's fans to anticipate.

-Terrell Holmes



RUSSELL MALONE
Live at Jazz Standard Vol One
MAXJAZZ

Those who know Malone as the seemingly infallible provider of the musical equivalent of le mot juste may be surprised at the visceral qualities of the fine guitarist on this live album. Supported by his highly competent working rhythm section of Martin Bejerano (piano), Tassili Bond (bass) and Johnathan Blake (drums), Malone leads a straight-ahead date on which the quartet, urged on by the audience, swings mightily. Sometimes the excitement takes over, especially on the closing Malone Blues, where the guitarist delivers a BB King imitation. But the best performances are on stronger material, such as Milt Jackson's soulful Heartstrings, Frank Rosolino's jaunty Blue Daniel and Malone's own Flirt, which benefits from the brevity of the solos. One for the fans. www.maxjazz.com

-Ray Comiskey