

# Shan Arsenault

**Jazz Guitarist, Composer, Educator**

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## Reviews

### **Shan Arsenault: the Jazz Beat Sessions - Jazz Guitar Life Review - Lyle Robinson**

Canada has given the Jazz Guitar Community some wonderful players over the years. Ed Bickert, Lorne Lofsky, Reg Schwagger, Bill Coon, Oliver Gannon, Mike Rud, Greg Clayton, Warren Greig, Brian Hughes, and others, have all graced the musical landscape both domestically and internationally as popular representatives of great Jazz Guitar playing. Now a new name can be added to this illustrious list of Canadian Jazz Guitar talent: Shan Arsenault.

With the recent release of his debut CD *Shan Arsenault: the Jazz Beat Sessions*, the Halifax based Arsenault steps into the Jazz Guitar arena in fine form as he demonstrates a keen sense of trio interplay, musical acumen and improvisational ability that stands alongside the aforementioned jazz pickers. Intense solos, sinuous technique, thoughtful comping, and well crafted catchy tunes speak volumes of Arsenault's sensibility as an improviser and composer. From the haunting opening track *Comeback*, to the delicate *Suspense* and the frenzied *That Something*, Arsenault throws all that he has into the musical pot with an intensity and enthusiasm that is both refreshing and gratifying to the ear.

Each of the nine tunes on the CD, seven originals and two standards, showcase Arsenault's talent as a composer and a player juxtaposing his rock and jazz influences into a single voice that is unabashedly original. Hammer-ons, pull-offs, slurred notes, blazing single lines, stirring chords, great tone, and a fluid legato style make up the meat of Arsenault's improvisational style. A style that is void of guitaristic cliches and improvisational formulas. Even when playing through the standard changes of *What's New* and *Confirmation*, Arsenault sticks to his musical intuitiveness preferring to rely solely on the moment rather than playing it safe, which is what the art of improvisation is truly all about. Check out the outro solo on Arsenault's *Call It Love* and the intro to *That Something* for a good example of this or *The Spin* where the interplay between the trio hangs just left of free. Great stuff!

And speaking of the trio, bassist Jamie Gatti and drummer Tom Roach along with guest drummer Dave Burton, who appears on the first four tunes, provide tremendous support and inspiring musicianship alongside Arsenault. In fact, the sound is so huge that I sometimes forgot that it was a trio.

Just check out Gatti's take on *Confirmation* as he takes the head and gets some great solo space or his sensitive electric fretless playing on *Suspense* or his acoustic bass soloing on *Fiddlehead*. Some really wonderful playing going on here. And drummers Roach and Burton offer the same quality of musicianship as they swing and propel the music far beyond the call of duty. I especially liked Burton's use of cymbals and high hat through out each tune, particularly on *Fiddlehead* and Roach's playing on *The Spin* is just superlative as is his playing on all the other tunes he's on. They really are a bunch of impressive players and I would be surprised if I didn't hear more about them in the near future.

The same goes for Shan Arsenault. He definitely is a player that deserves wider recognition and I hope it won't be long before his name is brought up alongside the more popular of Canada's jazz guitar players. Whether you are a fan of Jazz Guitar or merely a fan of great jazz music, *Shan Arsenault: the Jazz Beat Sessions* should be a definite addition to your music collection.

### **Review by Edward Blanco for <http://www.jazzreview.com>**

Featured Artist: Shan Arsenault  
CD Title: Shan Arsenault the Jazz Beat Sessions  
Year: 2005  
Record Label: CBC Radio Two  
Style: Progressive

Musicians: Shan Arsenault (guitar), Jamie Gatti (bass), Tom Roach (drums, tracks 5-9), Dave Burton (drums, tracks 1-4)

Guitarist Shan Arsenault is an experienced sideman on the Canadian jazz scene, who has performed with countless musicians, bands and has participated in various jazz festivals throughout Canada, including the prestigious Montreal International Jazz Festival. Among his many credits are two appearances on the Canadian CBC radio program "Jazz Beat," which aired nationwide and has been rebroadcast several times. This new release, *The Jazz Beat Sessions* is, in effect, a compilation of the music recorded in those two sessions.

The *Jazz Beat Sessions* CD is a recording of seven original Arsenault compositions and two standards. The music is soft and mellow in a non-traditional progressive jazz style. The trio includes bassist Jamie Gatti and drummers Tom Roach and Dave Burton, who share the drum duties on different tracks.

With only the basic three instruments producing the music, you'll hear plenty of solos from Arsenault as well as from bassist Gatti. Arsenault plays the chords with effortless motion. The guitar riffs are crisp and clear and dominate the tunes with style. There are examples of this on the third track "That Something" where he plays those guitar runs with ease and cool. On "Fiddlehead" Arsenault turns up the beat accompanied by some nice section work on drums and a bass solo.

On the Burke/Haggart composition "What's New," the music begins and remains soft and low tempo with periodic and graceful guitar solos that highlight this artist's talent and mastery of the instrument. This is a beautiful rendition of this standard. The other standard on this recording is the old Charlie Parker number "Confirmation," which opens with a short Gatti bass solo that is followed by an Arsenault run and includes a couple of drum solos that combine for a fine finish.

The Jazz Beat Sessions is an album that provides a brief but interesting look at the talents of a wonderful guitarist icon in the making. His refreshing new writing and gentle treatment of the melodies through his musicianship seem to make the music flow with sophistication and grace.

Tracks: Comeback, Suspense, That Something, Fiddlehead, Call It Love, What's New, Confirmation, The Spin, Middle Ground.

### **CD Review by Stephen Petersen, The Halifax Herald, Saturday, July 9, 2005**

Shan Arsenault: The Jazz Beat Sessions (Independent)

Halifax guitarist, Shan Arsenault is an original. His style of playing can only be compared to himself - which is the mark of someone who thinks jazz like poets think images, or painters think hues. With the collaboration of Jamie Gatti on bass, and Tom Roach [& Dave Burton on drums], The Jazz Beat Sessions, cleanly and resonantly recorded by CBC producer Jeff Reilly, gives Arsenault a chance to shine without anyone accusing him of too many notes.

As Mozart said in answer to the Austrian emperor's accusations, not too many, just the right number. They come in flurries and roulades and in sensitively placed single notes snared down to earth from the higher ends of the harmonic overtone series. On this session of seven originals and two tributes, Burke/Haggart's beautiful ballad What's New and Charlie Parker's whiz-bop rocket called Confirmation give favourable perspective to Arsenault's originality. All three musicians are on the same wavelength here. They listen to each other with their horns. Arsenault hears Gatti moving into a variation on the groove and chases happily after it in the middle of his solo (That Something). Arsenault began that tune with a signature helter-skelter intro, spraying notes all over the acoustic spectrum, then settling down to an introspective examination of motifs, none of which was too short to be ignored, or too long to evolve through parallel universes.

Comeback is a modest beginning in which Arsenault expands and develops a simple up-down flurry of notes within the compass of the motionless hand. The next tune, Suspense, features Gatti's acoustic bass snarling through the phrases, and ends with Roach playing his solo against a repeating coda figure. Fiddlehead is a well-shaped double-time tune in which the melody speeds away with minimal harmonic drag, as lively as a fiddle tune, though otherwise nothing like.

What's New and Confirmation, like the straight ahead ballad Call It Love, the medium tempo The Spin, and the brisk final cut, The Middle Ground, give the trio a lot of music to toy with. They sound as though they have been playing together for years.

## **Review by John Gilbert for eJazzNews.com**

A fine trio with solid solos are the highlights of this album.

"Fiddlehead" is a fast paced ditty with a semi bop feel. Shan Arsenault on guitar shows off his facility and ideation in fine style. Dave Burton's drumming is (thankfully) understated and his time is flawless.

The ballad side of Arsenault, et al, is beautifully executed on "What's New" This is a great tune and the ensemble pays respect to it with due diligence.

"Confirmation" is one of the Charlie Parker classics. Jamie Gatti's bass opens with the melody, Shan Arsenault follows suit and then solos masterfully in his turn at bat.

This is a nice recording with a tight trio setting that will be a hip addition to the jazzophiles collection.

4 Stars

## **Review by Troy Collins for Cadence Magazine Review**

"Canadian guitarist Shan Arsenault leads a delightful trio on this casual blowing session. With a nimble touch and fleeting lines, Arsenault and his empathetic trio deliver a solid mainstream album. Focusing on Arsenault's originals, the trio also delves into a few classics, including Charlie Parker's "Confirmation" and the standard "What's New." The majority of the tunes are catchy and upbeat Post-Bop excursions, but as a relative benchmark for an improviser's capabilities, nothing beats Parker's "Confirmation" for proving one's mettle. And the trio passes this test with flying colors."

"An astonishingly gifted soloist, Arsenault makes his busy linearity sound effortless and naturalistic, as opposed to busy and congested. His rhythm section complies with subtlety and refined playing. Both alternating drummers, Tom Roach and Dave Burton, traffic in delicate but energetic fugues. Jamie Gatti's bass lines are round and soft rather than percussive and bright, filling the bottom end with a nice deft touch. Arsenault himself is a clean player, with a resonant and thick, watery tone; he also dips into more assertive territory to convincing effect. Arsenault provides plenty of solo space for his trio mates, making for a truly democratic session. A strong release, mainstream guitar aficionados are going to find a wealth of pleasure in this artist's work."

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