

Paul Motian/Bill Frisell/Joe Lovano Time And Time Again

Joe Lovano: tenor saxophone; **Bill Frisell:** guitar; **Paul Motian:** drums

ECM 1992

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"Whenever we play, Paul Motian is handing the music from the source, whether it's a Bill Evans tune, a standard, a Monk tune, or one of his own compositions. After all this time, I still never know what is going to happen; it feels new every time. There's no way to put into words how important this relationship has been to me. It's like I've won the lottery, or I've been blessed."

- Bill Frisell*

Time and time again, since they first played together on the quintet album "Psalm" in 1981, Paul Motian, Bill Frisell, and Joe Lovano have reconvened to make new music or, as Frisell says, to renew older music: when Paul Motian plays the distinction between 'old' and 'new' disappears. At 76, Motian remains a thoroughly *modern* jazz musician who embodies a vast part of the tradition, and a drummer-composer whose sense of time is entirely his own. He has always cited Thelonious Monk, with whom he played more than 50 years ago, as his biggest influence, and it is not simply Monk's stubbornness and artistic independence that has inspired him. Listen to the trio play Thelonious's "Light Blue" here and it is clear that Monk's chasmic rhythmic displacements are amongst the basic means Motian has incorporated to keep the music moving and the sound of surprise alive in his work. The group Motian/Frisell/Lovano (now in its 23rd year of existence as a trio) has developed a vocabulary in which the pulse is seldom stated explicitly, yet the pieces continue to dance in a uniquely airborne way. The dynamic range of this drifting, floating music is, at the same time, wider than it has ever been, and instrumental roles rotate continuously.

The group's sound, immediately identifiable – there is nothing else quite like it anywhere – is abstract, tender, robust, fragile, evanescent. Themes flower out of collective improvising and disappear again. Melodies are constantly exchanged between Frisell and Lovano, and Motian, an exquisite colourist, is hyper-alert to tone and texture. Intense and delicate interplay is taking place constantly: Manfred Eicher's crystal-clear production renders all of it audible.

On "Time And Time Again", recorded in New York in 2006, and a worthy successor to 2004's "I Have The Room Above Her", new material, once again, is largely from Paul Motian. "I'm not exactly Cole Porter", he told *Modern Drummer* magazine recently of his compositional fluency, "but I generally find what I'm looking for." From a musician who had not written his own pieces until ECM encouraged him to do so, for his debut leader disc "Conception Vessel" in 1972, he has developed into a unique jazz composer whose tunes often hint of folk colours. Saxophonist Joe Lovano also contributes a piece this time, "Party Line", full of broken lines and pointillist stippling from Frisell and Motian, made inviting by Lovano's own breathy tenor phrasing. The three of them also reinvent the Rodgers/Hammerstein song "This Nearly Was Mine" from the musical "South Pacific" (the piece has not often been used as a springboard for freer playing, although there is a celebrated version by Cecil Taylor).

Joe Lovano and Bill Frisell, who had been classmates at the Berklee school, were still finding their way as players when Motian became an important mentor for them. Each of course is now widely recognised as amongst the foremost exponents of his instrument. Bill Frisell, for instance, tops the recently published Down Beat Readers Poll as guitarist of the year. Lovano on several previous occasions has also topped the DB polls, and like Frisell, has dozens of other awards to his credit. He came to Motian after a period with Woody Herman's big band, and it was while with the drummer that Lovano began to make his own records as a leader and, subsequently, to front his own bands. Since then he has recorded prolifically, with artists including John Scofield, Herbie Hancock, Elvin Jones, Charlie Haden, Carla Bley, Bobby Hutcherson, Billy Higgins, Dave Holland, Ed Blackwell, Michel Petrucciani, Lee Konitz, Abbey Lincoln, Tom Harrell, McCoy Tyner, Jim Hall, Bob Brookmeyer and many more. And he has recorded around 30 albums as a leader, many for Blue Note. He has recently been playing in his own expanded ensemble which has collaborated with composer/arranger Gunther Schuller, and he has appeared as soloist in performances of Mark Anthony Turnage's Concerto for Saxophone and Chamber Orchestra. Lovano's was last heard on ECM with Marc Johnson on "Shades of Jade" in 2004.

Bill Frisell first recorded for the label in 1979, on Eberhard Weber's "Fluid Rustle", soon followed by other recordings, amongst them "In Line", the guitar's leader debut in 1982. Albums for ECM in wide-ranging contexts have included major recordings with Jan Garbarek ("Paths, Prints"), Paul Bley ("Fragments"), Gavin Bryars ("After The Requiem") and Kenny Wheeler ("Angel Song"), as well as discs with Motian, his own albums "Rambler" and "Look Out For Hope", and Marc Johnson's Bass Desires band where he shared guitar duties with John Scofield. Frisell compiled a selection of his favourite ECM tracks for his "Selected Recordings" disc in the Rarum series, released in 2002. His playing has gone through many metamorphoses and absorbed and adapted aspects of blues, folk, rock and country music as well as jazz. On non-ECM recordings he has collaborated with the most diverse musicians - from Marianne Faithfull to John Zorn, from Ronald Shannon Jackson to Elvis Costello.

Both Frisell and Lovano have continued to make space in their crowded schedules for work with Paul Motian, and the trio's sound and music have evolved over the years. Frisell rations his use of foot pedals and effects these days. Some digital delay and loops early on here, in the opening "Cambodia" and on "In Remembrance of Things Past". But for the most part he is playing with a purer tone, expression coming from his fingers, not the equipment...

"These three great jazz musicians have always sounded as if they're doing, simultaneously, whatever they want in this unpretentiously abstract band; quietly, over two decades, it has become a major influence in jazz."
Ben Ratliff, New York Times

Paul Motian who has played with so many jazz greats – Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans, Paul Bley, Lennie Tristano, John Coltrane, Stan Getz, Gil Evans, Coleman Hawkins, Keith Jarrett and dozens more – has been especially ubiquitous at ECM in recent seasons, heard not only on his own discs, but also with Enrico Rava and Stefano Bollani ("Tati"), Anat Fort ("A Long Story"), Bobo Stenson ("Goodbye") and Martin Speake ("Change of Heart").

He recently received the honorary prize of the French Académie Charles Cros on the basis of work including the ECM album "Garden of Eden".

** Bill Frisell quote from forthcoming book "Horizons Touched: The Music of ECM" (Granta Books, UK, March 2007)*