

MIKE STERN

Profile

In a career that spans three decades and a discography that includes more than a dozen eclectic and innovative recordings, six-time GRAMMY® nominee Mike Stern has established himself as one of the premier jazz and jazz-fusion guitarists and composers of his generation.

Born in Boston in January 1953, Stern grew up in Washington, DC, then returned to Boston to study at the Berklee College of Music. After college, he got his start as a guitar player with Blood, Sweat & Tears at age 22. Following a brief stint with Billy Cobham's powerhouse fusion band from 1979 to 1980, he moved to New York City, where he was recruited by Miles Davis to play a key role in Miles' celebrated comeback band of 1981 (which also included bassist Marcus Miller, drummer Al Foster, percussionist Mino Cinelu and saxophonist Bill Evans). During his three-year period with Miles, Stern appeared on three recordings with the jazz maestro – *Man with the Horn*, *Star People* and the live *We Want Miles*. He toured with Jaco Pastorius' Word of Mouth Band from 1983 through 1985 and returned to Miles' lineup for a second tour of duty that lasted close to a year.

In 1985, Stern recorded *Neesh*, his first recording as a leader, for the Japan-based Trio label. A year later, he made his debut on Atlantic with *Upside Downside*, featuring such celebrated colleagues as David Sanborn, Jaco Pastorius, saxophonist Bob Berg, bassists Mark Egan and Jeff Andrews, keyboardist Mitch Forman and drummers Dave Weckl and Steve Jordan. Over the next two years, Stern was a member of Michael Brecker's potent quintet, appearing on *Don't Try This At Home*.

In the summer of 1986, Stern took to the road with David Sanborn and later joined an electrified edition of Steps Ahead, which featured Mike Mainieri on midi vibes, Michael Brecker on the Electronic Wind Instrument (EWI), Darryl Jones on electric bass and Steve Smith on drums.

Stern's second Atlantic album, *Time In Place* (1988), delivered on the promise of his debut. He followed with *Jigsaw* (1989) and *Odds Or Evens* (1991), both of which ably showcased his legendary guitar prowess and musicality. During this period he also formed a touring group with Bob Berg that included drummer Dennis Chambers and bassist Lincoln Goines. They remained a working unit from 1989 to 1992, at which point Stern joined Michael and Randy Brecker in a reunited Brecker Brothers Band, appearing on *Return of the Brecker Brothers*, released in 1992. Other notable sideman credits include work with the late tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson and the live recording *4 Generations of Miles*, in which he joins other Miles Davis alumni George Coleman on tenor sax, Jimmy Cobb on drums and Ron Carter on bass.

The '90s proved to be a prolific and critically successful period for Stern. His acclaimed 1993 release, *Standards (And Other Songs)*, earned him the pick of Best Jazz Guitarist of

the Year by the readers and critics of *Guitar Player* magazine. He followed that up with two hard hitting offerings – *Is What It Is* in 1994 and *Between The Lines* in 1996 – both of which scored GRAMMY® nominations. In 1997, he recorded *Give And Take* with bassist John Patitucci, drummer Jack DeJohnette, percussionist Don Alias and special guests Michael Brecker and David Sanborn. Their freewheeling covers of Sonny Rollins’ “Oleo,” John Coltrane’s “Giant Steps,” Cole Porter’s “I Love You” and Jimi Hendrix’s “Who Knows” helped Stern earn the Orville W. Gibson Award for Best Jazz Guitarist that year. Stern’s ninth release for Atlantic was a six-string summit with colleagues Bill Frisell and John Scofield that was appropriately titled *Play*. His *Voices* (2001) release, his first foray into vocal music, was also another GRAMMY® nominee.

After 15 years with Atlantic, Stern shifted to ESC for the 2004 release of *These Times*, an eclectic set that included guest appearances by some high-profile session players – bassist Richard Bona, saxophonist Kenny Garrett and banjoist Bela Fleck.

Stern joined Heads Up International, a division of Concord Music Group, with the August 2006 release of *Who Let the Cats Out?* Regardless of who let them out, the cats are indeed loose on this album, and making a serious noise. Included on the guest roster are bassists Richard Bona (who handles vocals on two tracks), Anthony Jackson, Meshell Ndegeocello, Chris Minh Doky and Victor Wooten, trumpeter Roy Hargrove, saxophonists Bob Franceschini and Bob Malach, drummers Dave Weckl and Kim Thompson, harmonica player Gregoire Maret, and keyboardist/producer Jim Beard. Stern received his 4th GRAMMY® nomination for *Who Let The Cats Out?* .

At the Festival International de Jazz de Montréal in June 2007, Stern was honored with the Miles Davis Award, which was created to recognize internationally acclaimed jazz artists whose body of work has contributed significantly to the renewal of the genre. Previous recipients include Keith Jarrett, Michael Brecker and Charlie Haden. Stern was also the artist in residence.

During that same festival, Stern joined the renowned Yellowjackets for some electrifying live performances. The dates served as the catalyst for *Lifecycle*, a Yellowjackets/Stern studio collaboration considered by many to be one of the most innovative and memorable jazz albums of 2008. The first Yellowjackets recording in 15 years to feature a guitar player, *Lifecycle* illustrates the kind of energy and creative brilliance that results when five talented players pool their individual skills as songwriters and musicians and merge into an entity that’s far greater than the sum of its parts. *Lifecycle* was later nominated for a GRAMMY® for Best Contemporary Jazz Album.

A frequent world traveler, Stern took his group to Europe, Asia and elsewhere throughout much of 2008 – an ambitious itinerary that included a memorable one-nighter at the New Morning, the longstanding and highly celebrated club in Paris, France. This electrifying show in front of a capacity-plus crowd in May 2008 was captured on film for posterity and presented in *New Morning: The Paris Concert*, a live DVD released in March 2009. Backing Stern on this gig is the expert crew of saxophonist Bob Franceschini, bassist Tom Kennedy and drummer Dave Weckl (who also mixed the DVD).

In February 2009, in the first in a series of articles to celebrate *DownBeat*'s 75th anniversary, Stern was named to the venerable jazz magazine's list of 75 Great Guitarists. The list spotlights many all-time great jazz, blues and beyond guitarists and shows the wide-ranging influence that the guitar has had on music since it made its way into jazz in the 1920s.

In August 2009, Stern released ***Big Neighborhood***. Aiding him in this latest chapter in his never-ending quest for the new and better groove is a long list of talented guests: guitarists Steve Vai and Eric Johnson; bassist-vocalists Esperanza Spalding and Richard Bona; jamband godfathers Medeski Martin & Wood; drummers Dave Weckl, Terri Lyne Carrington, Cindy Blackman and Lionel Cordew; bassists Chris Minh Doky and Lincoln Goines, saxophonists Bob Franceschini and Bob Malach, trumpeter Randy Brecker and keyboardist/producer Jim Beard. ***Big Neighborhood*** was also nominated for a GRAMMY® for Best Contemporary Jazz Album.

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