



Live Jazz: Lee Ritenour at Catalina Bar & Grill  
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By Devon Wendell

Lee Ritenour kicked off a three-night stretch at Catalina Bar & Grill in Hollywood Friday with a powerful set filled with jazz, rock, blues, and funk for the guitar aficionado. His performance was a celebration of his upcoming album *Six String Theory* album, dedicated to the guitar's vital role in the genres of rock, blues, country and jazz. The album features guests such as B.B. King, George Benson, John Scofield, and introduces The Six String Theory contest, in which guitar finalists in each category will be chosen to compete based on standout audition videos. The grand prize winner will be featured on a track on the album and win a full scholarship to The Berklee School of music.

Backed by a trio of some of the finest players in jazz and Lee Ritenour r&b — keyboardist John Beasley: bassist Melvin Davis and drummer Will Kennedy - Ritenour opened the set with "Boss City" from his 1993 Wes Montgomery tribute album *Wes Bound*. Starting the tune with Montgomery's trademark guitar octaves, he combined jazz phrasing with straight ahead blues licks. Using the bright, reverberated tone that he is known best for, phrasing with incredible dynamics, Ritenour alternated from hard and loud to sweet and low, incorporating volume and wah-wah effects with a clean tone. The funky pulse-like synchronicity between Davis and Kennedy sustained the rhythm in a tight groove, with Beasley adding some Larry Young styled, simulated B-3 organ effects on his electric keyboard.

Next, the band took the pace down with the Oliver Nelson classic, “Stolen Moments,” with Ritenour playing some slow, melodic blues leads, his lines displaying his more delicate and economical sensibilities. Davis and Kennedy, meanwhile, kept the gut-bucket, shuffle rhythm feeling intact, their subtle, propulsive groove bringing to mind Jimmy Smith’s smoky, after hours soul.

On Antonio Carlos Jobim’s familiar tune “Stone Flower,” Ritenour and company ventured into a more psychedelic, Miles Davis –fusion sound rather than the traditional Brazilian style of the original. Ritenour’s boundless energy, effortlessly alternating between lead and rhythm, increased the energy and volume level, driving Davis and Kennedy to reach out and explore heights. Beasley brought the band back down with a wonderfully sensitive yet eerie solo. The tune, in sum, was a fine display of focused improvisation without overindulgence.

On “Wes Bound,” Ritenour’s solo leaped from jazz to blues to rock, at one point using a slide with a distorted tone to create an odd, yet imaginative, pedal steel sound. He then shifted gears, quickly dropping the slide and playing lightning fast arpeggios and lead runs. Beasley again countered with a trippy, utterly original organ solo.

Ritenour switched to nylon string acoustic guitar for “Waters Edge,” starting off unaccompanied, playing with a flamenco feel and Segovia-like chordal movement. The band joined in at precisely the right moment with Davis playing an amazing solo on his 7-string electric bass, mimicking Ritenour’s guitar phrasing and tone, while humorously singing along with each note. It was one of the standout moments of the set.

Ritenour then spoke of his first meeting with the recently deceased Les Paul as he picked up one of the late master’s signature guitars, launching into “Smoke ‘n’ Mirrors” — an up-tempo number with a late ‘60’s blues rock ambiance and a dash of ‘80’s jazz fusion. The result was Ritenour’s most impressive solo of the evening, as he aggressively attacked the guitar with dizzying speed and staccato picking, fearlessly venturing out of pure jazz and into all the genres of music that will be the focus of his Six String Theory project. Joined by the other players, he led the way in a romp through a tight, yet high spirited free form jam, with the band never losing sight of the song’s motif.

Though the set was short, with the band fully warmed up and hitting a peak only as it came to a close, Ritenour and his dedicated trio kicked off what will surely be an exciting weekend at Catalina’s with a sense of musical diversity, fun, and virtuosity. They finish their three performance run tonight.