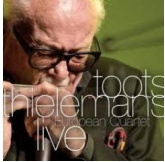


Toots Thielemans - European Quartet Live (2010)

Written by bluesever

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1. I Loves You Porgy; 2. Summertime; 3. Começar De Novo; 4. The Days Of Wine And Roses; 5. Circle of Smile; 6. 'Round Midnight; 7. Les Feuilles Mortes; 8. Theme From Midnight Cowboy; 9. On Green Dolphin Street; 10. Ne Me Quitte Pas; 11. Bluesette; 12. For My Lady. Personnel: Toots Thielemans -harmonica; Karel Boehlee - piano, synthesizer; Hein Van de Geyn - double-bass; Hans van Oosterhout - drums.

Jean "Toots" Thielemans' musical education started early—he had already started to play the accordion at the age of three. But it was his skill on the harmonica that brought him international fame, and it's that skill which is to the fore on *European Quartet Live*, featuring a set of well-known tunes taken from concerts in 2006, '07 and '08. It's the second Thielemans live album to be released in 2010 after *The Live Takes, Volume 1* (In + Out Records), which was recorded in the '90s and with a different lineup of musicians, but it also includes versions of the first three tracks to be found on *European Quartet Live*.

Thielemans was in his mid-80s when performing these concerts, but the precision and tone of his playing could well be that of a much younger musician. This is an album which has a comforting familiarity: a relaxed set that could have been recorded in a small club or even at a private party for friends, rather than in a series of concert halls. The European Quartet's other members give Thielemans sympathetic backing, the result, at least in part, of their long musical association. Drummer Hans van Oosterhout is particularly notable, providing subtle and inventive rhythms that are always interesting but never intrusive.

For the most part, these tunes are familiar, and the band's arrangements are mainstream—beautifully played, but with no surprises. The songs are ideal for Thielemans' warm and romantic style, but his playing is especially suited to fellow-Belgian Jacques Brel's "Ne Me Quitte Pas," and Joseph Kosma and Jacques Prevert's *Great American Songbook*

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standard, "Les Feuilles Mortes," also known as "Autumn Leaves," in which the harmonicist closes with a bar or two of the French anthem, "La Marseillaise."

The quartet's version of John Barry's theme to the film soundtrack of *Midnight Cowboy* (1969)—on which Thielemans also played—features a fine double-bass solo from Hein Van de Geyn, while on Thielemans' "Bluesette," the harmonicist adopts an accordion-like tone. Thelonious Monk's "Round Midnight" and George Gershwin's "Summertime" are also treated imaginatively by the quartet. "Summertime" gets an upbeat, swinging arrangement, its opening bearing more than a passing resemblance to Miles Davis' "All Blues," with both Thielemans and pianist Karel Boehlee delivering positive solos. Thielemans performs "Round Midnight" unaccompanied, and it's an inspired take on this classic tune, showcasing the harmonicist's continued ability to play with empathy and emotion.

The venues at which *European Quartet Live* was recorded are not identified, but their audiences all give the band an enthusiastic welcome, as if they are greeting old friends. In return, Thielemans and his band mates deliver what the audiences expect: classic tunes, played with warmth and enthusiasm. ---Bruce Lindsay, allaboutjazz.com

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