

AL DI MEOLA & LEONID AGUTIN

Cosmopolitan Life

One has been repeatedly hailed as one of the world's greatest guitarists; the other is Russia's biggest rock star. With twenty million album sales between them, the union of Al Di Meola and Leonid Agutin seems destined for success. For their debut album together, "Cosmopolitan Life", the two have created a unique sound, giving the term crossover a new dimension. Dreamily beautiful pop tunes meld with Russian jazz, Gypsy rhythms and Argentinian tango. Although Agutin sings mostly in English, many other languages figure. The title song, for instance, has a Portuguese chorus. The Muscovite's distinctive voice leads the listener through a variety of cultures. "People from all countries can recognize themselves in our songs," he says. "A European will get just as much from our CD as an African, American, Asian or Latin."

Each song has a mood of its own. The sunny "Tango" is bubbling over with South American vivacity. "Blue River" shows off the many and varied facets of pop music. "Portofino" conjures up a warm summer night in southern Europe. "Cuba Africa" blends African elements with Cuban sounds. All these songs leave plenty of scope for Di Meola's brilliant guitar playing, whether the artist is displaying his virtuosity in solos or providing discreet accompaniment to Agutin's vocals.

Al Di Meola and Leonid Agutin spent almost two years at work on their album. The story began in 2002 with five joint appearances in Moscow and St Petersburg. "We were exploring each other's musical worlds at the time," Agutin recalls. He was fascinated by Di Meola's sophisticated guitar riffs and rich harmonies. His partner was impressed by the great potential of the Russian's compositions: "For me, Agutin's music is not typically Russian, it is international," Di Meola affirms. From the start, his guitar playing fitted in perfectly with Agutin's songs. That was why the duo decided to record their CD in the legendary Criteria Hit Factory in Miami, engaging only the best musicians: Anthony Jackson, Vinnie Collaiuta, Gumbi Ortiz, Ron Taylor, all masters in their own field.

Once in the studio, Di Meola and Agutin expected peak performance from every participant. They laid the foundations together, and then they set to work separately in New York and



Moscow on polishing the songs. The recording took over a year. "We gave a lot of attention to each individual number," Agutin relates. They were very critical in selecting which songs should go on the album. They came up with ten memorable tracks in which every note has its place. And yet: there is always room for development, at least according to Agutin. At every concert, he is on the lookout for new aspects of his material. A concert makes more of an impression than any CD, he insists. A show in Berlin last month proved his assertion. In Germany's multicultural capital, he and Di Meola introduced "Cosmopolitan Life" to its first live audience. The evening also featured some of Di Meola's own compositions, enhancing his reputation as one of the truly great guitarists. In its first week of release the album entered the German charts.

After studying at Berklee School of music, Al Di Meola was invited by Chick Corea to join "Return to Forever", winning a Grammy at the age of only 19 with this legendary ensemble. He released a large number of solo albums, adding to his reputation in the 1980s in a trio with, Paco de Lucia and John McLaughlin. He went on to link up with Stanley Clarke and Jean-Luc Ponty in 1995. His solo CD "Infinite Desire" spent over three months of 1999 in the Billboard Contemporary Jazz Charts, climbed to Number 3 in the German jazz charts and was at the top of the Italian jazz charts for eight weeks. The follow-up albums enjoyed similar success with the most recent "Flesh on Flesh" receiving highly appreciative reviews in 2002. His records have sold more than nine million copies.

Leonid Agutin is another darling of the critics. Born in Moscow, he studied piano there and began writing songs in 1991; his 1994 solo debut "The Barefoot Fella" made him a star in his homeland. He was named Singer of the Year in Russia and received further awards for Song and Album of the Year. Six more CDs followed, culminating in Agutin headlining at all the major Russian venues and appearing on every major TV show. In his native land alone, he has sold more than ten million albums. Since 1996, he regularly tours the USA. The Americans love him now as much as his own countrymen do. No wonder: Agutin is a world citizen, seeking to build cultural bridges with his music. He should find that easy enough in "Cosmopolitan Life" with Al Di Meola at his side - together, the pair scale the musical peaks.



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