

Ferenc Snétberger In Concert

Ferenc Snétberger: guitar

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In Concert is Ferenc Snétberger's first recording for ECM and a coming full circle for the Hungarian guitarist. It is drawn from a live performance at Budapest's Franz Liszt Academy of Music, where he once had formative experiences as a young listener: "I heard Bach and it changed my life." When Snétberger first encountered Johann Sebastian Bach, he was already steeped in jazz. In his richly musical Roma household his father and two brothers also played guitar – the records of John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Jim Hall and especially Django Reinhardt were a constant. "I started with jazz, and then the influence of classical music became very strong for me."

Later came exposure to the great touchstones and references of the guitar-player's universe: Brazilian, South American and flamenco. The elevating shock of hearing Egberto Gismonti in duo with Nana Vasconcelos provided a trigger. The gamut of these stylistic, cultural and personal exposures and influences spreads like a colour infusion through the music of *In Concert*. Snétberger has apprehended something essential of the purity of each of these strands. It's precisely the combination and diversity of Snétberger's heterogeneity, open and generous yet rarefied, that makes the ebb and flow of *the music* so captivating.

Eight of the pieces on the album are named for Budapest, Ferenc's *ville de coeur* if not his home town (which is Salgótarján, about 120km to the north). "Budapest I" opens with an improvisation, comprising about half the performance, before the melody finally arrives. The tune Ferenc has performed in other formats notably in duo with trumpeter Markus Stockhausen, but here it is wholly transformed. As Snétberger describes it, the tune sits in him at all times "almost ready" for performance.

Also largely improvised, "Budapest II" gives witness to the impact of Bach on Snétberger's musical conception. "Before I play it, I hear Bach's tones," he says. The listener has the impression of multiple reflections, at various stages three voices — treble, bass and middle register.

"Budapest III" begins slowly with sounds like harp notes. The guitarist says Argentine 'nuevo tango' composer Astor Piazzolla inspired the melody which was originally written for a film, but is largely subsumed here in an extended improvisation. "Budapest IV" is another evocation of multiple voices, the catchy chordal melody redolent of a Brazilian samba. Suddenly, seductively, the melody is suspended and one has the impression of a saxophone or right-hand improvisation on the piano.

"Budapest V" is a free improvisation. The piece is without a fixed pulse but the timing inside it — a distinction (timing versus tempo) Ferenc keenly makes — helps explain perhaps the sense of both looseness and precision.

"Budapest VI" announces an entirely different mood. Listeners familiar with the guitarist's oeuvre may recognise the melody, a motive from a tune ("Empathy") written for large ensemble and performed previously with Arild Andersen and Paolo Vinaccia.

The light-touch, open harmonies of "Budapest VII" evoke springtime for the guitarist. This was the first time this tune was ever performed. With the ballad "Budapest VIII", the music takes a reflective turn. A version of "Over the Rainbow" rounds out the album, the concert encore at the Liszt Academy. Further ECM recordings with Ferenc Snétberger are in preparation, including a disc with Ferenc's new trio with Anders Jormin and Joey Baron.