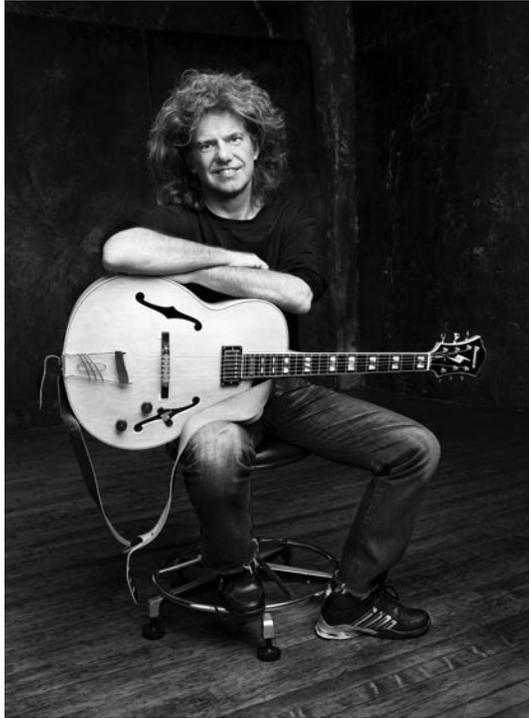


Saturday, April 24, 2010, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Pat Metheny



Jimmy Katz

The Orchestrion Tour

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The Orchestrion Project

I HAVE BEEN VERY LUCKY over the years to have many opportunities to explore a wide range of ideas as a musician. The quest to find new ways of thinking about things and the process of trying to come up with a personal perspective on music has been a major priority along the way, almost from the very beginning.

The Orchestrion Project is a leap into new territory. This project represents a recently developed conceptual direction for me that involves the merging of an idea from the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the technologies of today to create an open-ended platform for musical invention and performance.

“Orchestrionics” is the term that I am using to describe a new performance method to present music alone onstage using acoustic and acousto-electric musical instruments that are mechanically controlled using the power of modern technology.

In early 2010, my new recording, *Orchestrion*, was released on Nonesuch. It is a “solo” record in that I am the only musician, but it is a CD that in some ways recontextualizes the term.

Some background: In the late 1800s and early 1900s, as player pianos (pianos played mechanically by moving rolls of paper through a mechanism that physically moved the keys) emerged, the next logical step was to apply that same principle to a range of orchestral instruments, often including percussion and mallet instruments. These large instrument arrays were called Orchestrions.

For a number of years now, I have been gathering the forces of a group of talented and innovative inventors and technicians from around the country to construct a large palette of acoustic sound-producing devices that I can organize as a new kind of Orchestrion. The principle instruments have been designed and built for me by the incredibly talented Eric Singer, who is a major innovator in this area of engineering.

A small number of musicians have been doing things like this in recent years as the mechanics of it all has evolved. And naturally, in many ways,

it has been as much about the technology as the musical result. My only goal here, however, is a musical one.

Now, nearly 10 years into the new century, it feels like time to try to create something particularly connected to the reality of this unique period in time.

The issue of context is crucial to this project. As much as I have and will continue to enjoy playing in traditional formats (solo, duets, trios, quartets and quintets, various large ensembles, the Pat Metheny Group, however one might place that in this spectrum), the urge to investigate what might be possible in this relatively unexplored corner of potential has been building.

One of the inspiring hallmarks of the jazz tradition through the decades has been the way that the form has successfully ushered in musical contexts, resulting in new performance environments for players and composers. This pursuit of change and the way that innovators in jazz have reconciled the roots of the form with the new possibilities of their own time has been an inspiration and a major defining element for me in the music’s evolution at every key point along the way. From new combinations of instruments and new performance techniques, to technological shifts in the instruments themselves that were deployed first in jazz settings (the drum set, the use of the saxophone, the modification and adaptation of European classical instruments, the electric guitar, etc.) to large ensemble presentation and composition (big bands, etc.), jazz musicians have often been the ones trying new things, looking for new sounds. This quest, in tandem with the generation of deep and soulful content, has made the story of jazz a fascinating journey.

In recent years, we have watched the form continue mostly along the lines of refinement (at best) and historical retrenchment and revisionism (at worst). For example, in my case I have enjoyed playing trio music year in and year out from the beginning of my career, and the task of finding

new ways of looking at many of the same issues that were of major importance to me early on has been an important journey that stands on its own and has been a trip worth taking. And the Pat Metheny Group mandate of engagement with the musical and technological potentials and realities of the times has been rewarding and valid as well—as I am sure it will continue to be in the (not too distant) future.

But in the meantime, I have found myself again craving for a context that is somehow intrinsically connected to this moment in time—to find something that could only be happening now.

Let me continue by going backwards a bit.

As a little kid, every few summers we would go visit my grandparents in Manitowoc, Wisconsin—my mother’s hometown. My grandfather (Delmar Bjorn Hansen) was a great musician, a brilliant trumpet player and singer whose love for great harmony was a strong early influence. Upon arrival at their family house, I would make a beeline to the basement, where one of the most fascinating objects I ever saw was kept: a 50-plus-year-old player piano, complete with boxes of piano rolls of all kinds of music. I would spend hours there with my cousins trying each roll, pumping until we were worn out by the pedals. The idea of an instrument like this, capable of playing just about anything mechanically, was totally mind-blowing to me. It was something utterly charming; on one hand it was old fashioned but, at the same time, it was almost like science fiction.

Throughout the years, that early fascination has grown and I have studied the tradition of these kinds of instruments including the Orchestrons of the early 20th century that took this idea further. Using various other orchestral instruments mechanically tethered to the piano/piano roll mechanism to develop ensemble sounds, a miniature orchestra was possible.

But, considering the repertoire that was usually called upon when these instruments were played (Conlon Nancarrow and George Antheil’s work was largely sadly absent from the world in which I grew up, or at least from my grandfather’s basement), I would often find myself asking over the years, “What might happen if the potentials

of these instruments were looked at now—particularly informed by the harmonic and melodic advances in jazz of the past 70 or 80 years? Could I form some kind of personal statement using instruments like these?”

Related to this interest was my total immersion in the general modern musical instrument technology (and later computers), which has been a major part of my life since I started playing music. (I often joke that my first musical act with an electric guitar was to “plug it in”—knobs and wires are the same to me as mouthpieces, bows, reeds and drumsticks are to other musicians.)

Parallel to the information revolution that has affected all of our lives, we have lived through a revolution in music technology that is almost overwhelming. Yet, at the same time, as much as I have been enthusiastic about the orchestrational potentials of synthesizers and electric instruments in general, and even as those instruments have improved enormously and continue to develop, the whole idea of jamming a whole bunch of combined sounds into a single set of stereo speakers has never been as satisfying to me as a single instrument into a single discrete amplification system (electric guitar) or especially, the power of acoustic instruments and sound.

The energy of sounds mixing acoustically in the air is something that cannot be compared with anything else.

Yet I have never seen any of these sound components as being mutually exclusive. In fact, the exciting thing for me has been the coalition possible using all kinds of available sounds and dynamic levels of all sorts—from the quietest of the quiet, to the loudest of the loud.

Ray Kurzweil, one of the most visionary thinkers in the world, was asked recently about his work in the area of artificial intelligence and I thought his response to a question that was essentially something to the effect of “Why do you do this?” was right on.

His reaction was to indicate the important ways throughout human history that new tools have allowed us to “extend our reach.”

In my life as a player there has never been a substitute for musical depth, which is informed by

the experiences of a lifetime and with the quest to invoke the spirit and soul that is core to what it is to be the kind of musician that I have aspired to become.

But many times along the way, the experience of a new challenge or the quest for a new way of looking at things—or a new tool—has allowed me (encouraged me? forced me?) to ask hard questions of myself as a musician.

This experience so far has provided me with a self-imposed challenge that has proven to be enormously difficult and time-consuming, but the early results have been absolutely exhilarating.

I am excited to share this project with all of you. I am hopeful and confident that if nothing

else, this will be something truly unique. It feels like progress to me and has gotten some notes out of me that I didn’t know were there. That is always a good thing.

Pat Metheny, July 2009

Postscript: I have realized by now that as much as I can describe this project, even the people closest to me have had no idea what I was talking about until they have actually heard the music and had an encounter with it all in action. So, even having written all of the above, I know for sure that you still have to experience it yourself to really understand what it is.

Pat Metheny (*guitar*) was born in Kansas City, Missouri, on August 12, 1954, into a musical family. Starting on trumpet at age 8, Mr. Metheny switched to guitar at age 12. By age 15, he was working regularly with the best jazz musicians in Kansas City, receiving valuable on-the-bandstand experience at an unusually young age.

Mr. Metheny first burst onto the international jazz scene in 1974 as a member of vibraphone great Gary Burton's band. Over the course of his three-year stint with Mr. Burton, Mr. Metheny was already displaying his soon-to-become trademark playing style, which blended the loose and flexible articulation associated with horn players with an advanced rhythmic and harmonic sensibility—a way of playing and improvising that was modern in conception but grounded in the jazz tradition of melody, swing and the blues. With the release of his first album, *Bright Size Life* (1975), Mr. Metheny reinvented the traditional “jazz guitar” sound for a new generation of players. Throughout his career, Mr. Metheny has continued to redefine the genre by utilizing new technology and working to evolve the improvisational and sonic potential of his instrument.

Mr. Metheny has performed with artists as diverse as Steve Reich, Ornette Coleman, Herbie Hancock, Jim Hall, Milton Nascimento and David Bowie. He has been part of a composing team with keyboardist Lyle Mays for more than 20 years—an association that has been compared to the Lennon-McCartney and Ellington-Strayhorn partnerships by critics and listeners alike. Mr. Metheny's *œuvre* includes works for solo guitar, small ensembles, electric and acoustic instruments, large orchestras, and ballet pieces, in settings ranging from modern jazz to rock to classical.

In addition to performing and composing, Mr. Metheny has served as a music educator. At age 18, he was the youngest-ever teacher at the University of Miami. At 19, he became the youngest-ever teacher at the Berklee College of Music, from which he also received an honorary doctorate in 1996. He has taught music workshops all over the world, from the Dutch Royal Conservatory to the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz to clinics in Asia and South America. He was a musical pioneer in the realm of electronic music, and was one of the first jazz musicians to treat the synthesizer as a serious instrument. Years before the invention of MIDI technology, Mr. Metheny was using the Synclavier as a composing tool. He has also been instrumental in the development of several new guitars, such as the soprano acoustic guitar, the 42-string Picasso guitar, Ibanez's PM-100 jazz guitar and a variety of other custom instruments.

Over the years, Mr. Metheny has won countless polls as “Best Jazz Guitarist” and numerous awards, including gold records for *Still Life Talking*, *Letter from Home* and *Secret Story*. He has also won 17 Grammy Awards in a variety of different categories, including Best Rock Instrumental Solo, Best Contemporary Jazz Recording, Best Jazz Instrumental Solo and Best Instrumental Composition. The Pat Metheny Group won an unprecedented seven consecutive Grammys for seven consecutive albums. Mr. Metheny has spent most of his life on tour, averaging between 120–240 shows per year since 1974. He continues to be one of the brightest stars in the jazz community, dedicating time both to his own projects and to those of emerging artists and established veterans alike, helping them to reach their audiences and to realize their own artistic visions.