

# Howard Alden- Jazz Guitarist



“He may be the best of his generation,” writes Owen Cordle in JAZZ TIMES. George Kanzler of the NEWARK STAR LEDGER proclaims that he is “the most impressive and creative member of a new generation of jazz guitarists.” And Chip Deffaa of the NEW YORK POST observes that he is “...one of the very finest young guitarists working today.” It seems that the only thing regarding Howard Alden on which the critics have debate is whether the remarkable jazz guitarist is *one of the best* or simply *the best*.

Born in Newport Beach, California, in 1958, Howard began playing at age ten, inspired by recordings of Louis Armstrong, Count Basie and Benny Goodman, as well as those by guitarists Barney Kessel, Charlie Christian, Django Reinhardt and George Van Eps. Soon he was working professionally around Los Angeles playing in groups ranging from traditional to mainstream to modern jazz. In 1979, Alden went east, for a summer in Atlantic City with vibraphone legend Red Norvo, and continued to perform with him frequently for several years.

Upon moving to New York City in 1982, Alden’s skills, both as soloist and accompanist, were quickly recognized and sought-out for appearances and recordings with such artists as Joe Bushkin, Ruby Braff, Joe Williams, Warren Vache` and Woody Herman. He has continued to win accolades from critics and musicians alike, adding Benny Carter, Flip Phillips, Mel Powell, Bud Freeman, Kenny Davern, Clark Terry, Dizzy Gillespie and George Van Eps, as well as notable contemporaries such as Scott Hamilton and Ken Peplowski to his list of impressive credits.

Howard Alden’s recordings for Concord Jazz beginning in the late ‘80s captured an artist of consistently astonishing virtuosity and originality. One of the many highlights in Howard Alden’s career came in 1991 when he recorded with one of his all-time heroes, seven-string guitar innovator and master George Van Eps on the album *THIRTEEN STRINGS*. As a result of his association with - and inspiration from - George Van Eps, Alden has been playing the seven-string guitar exclusively since 1992. The seven string guitar imparts a greater range and harmonic richness to Alden’s already colorful tonal palette, as evidenced on three remarkable follow-up



albums with Van Eps, his critically acclaimed duo recordings with saxophonist/clarinetist Ken Peplowski, and the stunning interplay between Alden and tenor saxophonist Frank Wess on *YOUR STORY-THE MUSIC OF BILL EVANS*. Alden also teamed up with fellow guitarists Jimmy Bruno and Frank Vignola to record a three guitar outing entitled *THE CONCORD JAZZ GUITAR COLLECTIVE*, which was quickly called by some critics “an instant classic!”.

Alden’s recording from 1996 *TAKE YOUR PICK* serves to underline Howard’s wide scope of knowledge of jazz literature. Throughout the disc, one is amazed at how skillfully Alden delivers interpretations with fresh surprises. Michael Moore, Bill Goodwin, Lew Tabackin, and Renee Rosnes combine with Alden to bring exciting interplay and thrills around every corner to the ten standard and lesser known gems hand picked for this recording. Released in honor of Concord’s 25th anniversary was a duo recording with fellow guitarist Jimmy Bruno, *FULL CIRCLE* teamed with the very first Concord release *JAZZ/CONCORD* featuring Herb Ellis and Joe Pass.

Howard can be heard on the soundtrack to the 1999 Woody Allen movie “*Sweet and Low Down*”, starring Sean Penn, who was also nominated for an Academy Award for his role as the legendary (but fictional!) jazz guitarist in the ‘30s, “Emmett Ray”. Howard not only played all the guitar solos, but also taught Mr. Penn to play the guitar for his role in the film. The London Observer has this to say about Alden’s solo guitar CD, “*MY SHINING HOUR*”, “If there is such a thing as a complete jazz guitarist, then Alden is it. Only a real virtuoso can sustain a whole CD of solo guitar with the aplomb he displays here.” 2003 saw the release of “*IN A MELLOW TONE*”, a duo recording with seven-string guitar legend and frequent collaborator, Bucky Pizzarelli. In 2004 Howard was the guitarist (and musical director) chosen for an all-star line-up commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Newport Jazz Festival which appeared in 50 cities of the United States in addition to their appearance at Newport. The 2005-2006 season saw Howard adding his acoustic guitar voice to violinist Mark O’Connor’s Hot Swing on his national concert tour. His latest recording, “*I REMEMBER DJANGO*”, once again features his distinctive acoustic sound, developing and expanding the warm and elegant spirit of his performance in “*Sweet and Low Down*”.



Howard Alden was voted “*Best Emerging Talent-Guitar*” in the first annual JAZZTIMES critics’ poll, 1990, and “*Talent Deserving Wider Recognition*” in the 1996, 1992, 1993 and 1995 DOWNBEAT critics’ poll. In February of 2009, Howard was recognized as a “**Modern Maestro**”, one of **DOWNBEAT MAGAZINE’S 75 Great Guitarists of all time!** “*An original virtuoso*”