

JAZZIZ

December 2004



Jean-Michel Pilc

Follow Me
(Dreyfus)

Jean-Michel Pilc is a French-born, New York



City-residing self-taught pianist who made his bones playing with Roy Haynes, Mike Brecker, and Daniel Humair, and as musical director for Harry Belafonte. Here, Pilc delivers

an unaccompanied recital, and he has an interesting approach: percussive, but more like Dave Brubeck than Cecil Taylor or Don Pullen; rhapsodic yet spare, in the manner of early '70s Keith Jarrett; a little of the bittersweet Gallic lyricism of Martial Solal (whom Pilc has also played with), but more of Solal's oblique, angular, not-quite-avant-garde, freer-than-hard-bop modernity.

Follow Me consists of 16 bite-sized but very filling miniatures (the longest track is 4:25). Some are jazz standards ("Oleo"), a couple are French standards ("Les Amants D'un Jour"), and a few are originals. While certainly no minimalist à la Monk, Pilc never crowds his notes, allowing them (and the spaces between the notes) to resonate and decay into stillness with poise.

Pilc's takes on standards are fascinating: "My Favorite Things" skirts broodingly around the famous melody, making it sound like a storm brewing, and the *tour de force* "St. James Infirmary" is "deconstructed" while, at the same time, the blues elements of the tune are compellingly accentuated.

While never dry or abstract, Pilc is a model for playing a little to say a lot. If only he'd refrained from that peripatetic whistling, as he does on a couple of tracks.

—Mark Keresman