

JAZZIZ

November 2004



Rocket man

For most people, "It's not rocket science" is just a figure of speech. But for 44-year-old pianist **Jean-Michel Pilc**, the phrase evokes the career crossroads where he found himself two decades ago.

The Paris-born, New York-based Pilc abandoned his career as a rocket scientist in France at age 23, specifically because music, well, *wasn't* rocket science.

"I was working on a telecommunications satellite to broadcast to people in Europe," Pilc recalls, "but I always felt so out of place there, and so in-place at the piano. I often say, 'I don't need a rocket to send me to Mars' because if you listen to Art Tatum, Thelonious Monk, or Beethoven you go to the other end of the galaxy without having to take any vessel."

Listening to the self-taught Pilc, though, is akin to hearing a musical collage of these artists, as well as influences from Bud Powell to Bix Beiderbecke. Pilc's first three, the two independently-released volumes of *Live at the Sweet Basil* and the Dreyfus studio debut *Welcome Home*, were mercurial trio efforts with bassist François Moutin and drummer Ari Hoenig. The group's telepathy — and Pilc's imagination, in particular — breathed new life into standards such

as "Stella By Starlight," "So What," and even "Giant Steps."

On his recently released, wildly diverse solo-piano disc *Follow Me*, Pilc focuses that fertile imagination on a new batch of jazz classics, including "My Favorite Things," "Autumn Leaves," W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues," and Bill Evans' "B Minor Waltz." Pilc includes four originals, and covers French standards such as Georges Brassens' "Les Copains D'Abord" and Charles Trenet's "Vous Qui Passez Sans Me Voir."

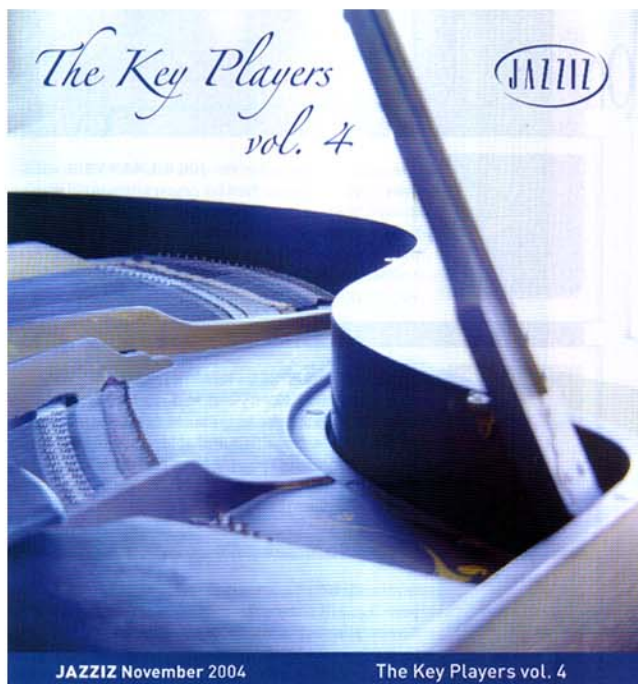
Follow Me has "always been in the air," says Pilc. "Sometimes I'd be playing at home, thinking 'I'd really like people to hear this.'"

The disc marks a clear change from its Dreyfus predecessor, *Cardinal Points*, on which the pianist focused on his songwriting while using a larger ensemble — including Moutin, Hoenig, saxophonist Sam Newsome, bassist James Genus, and percussionist Abdou M'Bouop.

Pilc will record a live CD this month with bassist Thomas Bramerie and drummer Mark Mondesir at Iridium in New York City. He also plays steadily with Hoenig's group at Fat Cat in Greenwich Village. www.jmpilc.com — **BM**



Jazz pianists such as Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans, and Keith Jarrett have undertaken the ultimate test — the unaccompanied solo piano album. Influenced by all three, Frenchman **JEAN-MICHEL PILC** follows suit with his new CD, *Follow Me* (Dreyfus Jazz). The New York-based pianist — a rocket scientist when he lived in France — had already garnered comparison to these artists through a series of trio recordings and his previous Dreyfus effort, *Cardinal Points*, recorded with a larger ensemble. On *Follow Me*, he tackles Evans' "B Minor Waltz," W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues," and Sonny Rollins' "Oleo." French standards and original pieces add to the variety pack, as does Pilc's arrangement of Rodgers & Hammerstein's featured "My Favorite Things," which saunters well beyond the original, familiar melody.



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The Key Players vol. 4

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- 01 **Dave Grusin** Memphis Stomp (from *The Firm*) *Now Playing* [GRP]
- 02 **Dr. Lonnie Smith** The Whip *Too Damn Hot* [Palmetto Records, Inc.]
- 03 **Joey Calderazzo** Bri's Dance *Haiku* [Marsalis Music/Rounder Records]
- 04 **Geri Allen** Unconditional Love *The Life of a Song* [Telarc]
- 05 **The Joe Gilman Trio** Blue Rondo a la Turk
Time Again: Brubeck Revisited Vol. 1 [Sunnyside Records]
- 06 **George Shearing** (Passos Gigantes) Giant Steps *Like Fine Wine* [Mack Avenue Records]
- 07 **George Kahn** Mercedes the Lady ... *Compared to What?* [Playing Records]
- 08 **Lynne Arriale Trio** Come Together *Come Together* [Motéma Music]
- 09 **Dan Fogel** Plan B *Something Like That* [Laughing Waters Records]
- 10 **Bruce Hornsby** Gonna Be Some Changes Made *Halcyon Days* [Columbia Records]
- 11 **Kerry Politzer** Whim *Watercolor* [Polisonic]
- 12 **Jean-Michel Pilc** My Favorite Things *Follow Me* [Dreyfus Jazz]
- 13 **Patricia Barber** Gotcha *Live: A Fortnight in France* [Blue Note Records]
- 14 **Joe Kurasz** Funky B *Soul Searching* [Ren Music, Inc.]
- 15 **Chick Corea Elektric Band** Check Blast *To the Stars* [Stretch Records]
- 16 **Yellowjackets** Peace Round *Peace Round* [Heads Up]

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