



Players >

JIM CAMPILONGO

Blending Genres

JOE FERBRUCC

Jim Campilongo's Brooklyn apartment is packed with the tools of his trade. Classic Martin, Gibson and Fender guitars from the 1950s through the '70s hang on a wall. Thousands of vintage, well-played vinyl records fill a cabinet. And a home audio system that would have been considered high-end back in the day—Klipsch speakers, McIntosh preamplifier, Dynaco amplifier, Dual turntable—is positioned among comfy overstuffed furniture.

While he might appear to live inside a time-warp, Campilongo's guitar playing is no more retro than, say, the music of Hank Mobley, Max Roach and Sonny Clark.

"Some people say I'm retro, but I just don't want to buy a useless piece of crap that's going to be broken in a year," Campilongo said. "I use tube amps. I play an old '59 Telecaster that's lasted a long time. I don't feel that I have a retro aesthetic; it's not some Brian Setzer romanticism for a different era. It's really just being smart. I love records and tube amps and old guitars that are worn and have history. What should I play, a Paul Reed Smith? It's a no-brainer."

Campilongo's ninth album, *Last Night, This Morning* (Blue Hen), showcases exciting, swinging electric guitar interplay. The sly-sounding, joy-filled album features his band the Honeyfingers, which includes guitarist/co-producer Luca Benedetti, pedal/lap steel guitarist Jonny Lam, gypsy jazz guitarist Roy Williams, bassist Dave Speranza and drummer Russ Meissner.

"I think my music is unique," Campilongo said. "It's not country, swing or blues, though it draws on all those things. My music swings, but it isn't Bob Wills. The album has counterpoint, and there's music that recalls an impro-

vised Bach piece, 'Little Song.' The opening track, 'Billy's Bird,' is highly influenced by Speedy West and Jimmy Bryant just for its unhinged quality. But it's not a business-card record; I'm not doing Wes Montgomery or Freddie King or Ennio Morricone, like some guitarists have. The familiar thread running through [this album] is my songwriting."

Recorded, mixed and mastered to tape, *Last Night, This Morning* features Benedetti's arranging and production work. Benedetti explained the collaborative nature of the sessions: "On 'Freaky Dreiky,' I'm harmonizing Jim's melody in the A sections and Jonny and myself created interplay during the bridge around Jim's part. [For] the harmonies, counter-parts and tonal/technical decisions, Jim and I were both there for 100 percent of the process."

The array of recordings that have influenced Campilongo's writing and guitar style is lengthy and diverse. "I spent a lot of time on Santo & Johnny's 'Sleepwalk' 20 years ago," he recalled. "I played it like Buddy Emmons, like Wes Montgomery, then like Chet Atkins. I did that with Django Reinhardt, too. Roy Buchanan's first album is a favorite. Speedy West and Jimmy Bryant's *Country Cabin Jazz*. Howard Roberts' *H.R. Is A Dirty Guitar Player*. I love John Lennon's guitar playing on *Plastic Ono Band*.

"I wore out Miles Davis' *Agharta*. I listened to [Davis'] *On The Corner* for a year straight. Now I'm listening to [classical guitarist Andrés] Segovia on Decca, which feels similar to John McLaughlin's playing on 'Double Image' [from the Davis album *Live-Evil*]. It feels good to hear Santo & Johnny, and it feels good to hear Miles Davis. It's all great, pure music."

—Ken Micallef

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