



PRESS RELEASE



RATKO ZJACA
ARCHTOP AVENUE
IOR LP 77153-2



1. Body And Soul	(5:03)	7. Way To Go	(3:26)	Ratko Zjaca - guitar
2. Prelude To A Kiss	(4:58)	8. The Dream Of Tomorrow	(3:57)	
3. Lonnie's Lament	(4:21)	9. The Heart Of Time	(3:38)	
4. Darn That Dream	(5:50)	10. Alone Together	(5:38)	
5. Monk's Dream	(4:32)	11. Polka Dots & Moonbeams	(4:43)	
6. For Heaven's Sake	(6:20)	12. Someone To Watch Over Me	(5:14)	

RATKO ZJACA ARCHTOP AVENUE (IN+OUT Records)

A mix of reverence and adventure. An intimate and demanding solo guitar outing by Ratko Zjaca. 9 standard 3 originals. Each song played on a different legendary instrument.

Dedicated to the world's most famous guitar builders and inspired by a list of musical teachers who opened up his musical horizons, from Joe Pass and Jim Hall to Joe Diorio, Mick Goodrick and Vic Juris. Archtop Avenue is a compelling addition to the canon of solo guitar and a crowning achievement in Zjaca's career to date.

In an interview for his previous album with the ZZ Quartet, 2021's *Midnight in Europe*, Croatian-born guitarist Ratko Zjaca explained how he and the group's co-leader, Italian accordionist Simone Zanchini, came to be so utterly eclectic in their musical tastes. "We like Hendrix, we like Fellini, we like Wayne Shorter, we like Michael Brecker, we like John Coltrane...and everything."

One other aspect of Ratko's musical makeup is his deep-seated love of jazz standards from the Great American Songbook. The longtime resident of Rotterdam, Netherlands explores those familiar vehicles with a mix of reverence and adventure in this intimate and demanding solo guitar outing, his 17th album as a leader/co-leader.

The prospect of playing standards in an unaccompanied setting — juggling chords, melody and bass lines — can be a daunting task for most guitarists. The legendary Jim Hall found the prospect "terrifying," while the great Joe Pass may have set the standard for solo guitar with his series of *Virtuoso* recordings from the 1970s.

Pass' influence weighs heavily throughout *Archtop Avenue*. You can hear it in the masterful, contrapuntal playing by Zjaca on Duke Ellington's gorgeous ballad "Prelude To A Kiss", on Jimmy Van Heusen's "Darn That Dream", and his introspective take on George & Ira Gershwin's "Someone to Watch Over Me". As Ratko explained, "My first jazz guitar album that I heard as a teenager was the *Virtuoso* solo album by Joe Pass. I couldn't believe that one man could play jazz guitar alone on the whole album and at such an incredible level. Obsessed with Joe in the beginning, I spent days and days studying his playing from records. And then when

I heard that he was teaching at the Rotterdam Conservatory, I decided to go to there." Zjaca took the entrance exam for the conservatory from his hometown in Zagreb, Croatia. He was accepted and over the course of five years there ended up studying with Pass when the great guitarist would come to Rotterdam Conservatory every few months to give lessons. "I learned a lot about chord melody style, counterpoint, repertoire and many other things," Ratko recalled. "But I soon realized that I had to work on my own way of playing."

Those personalized touches can be heard in his extrapolations of the familiar melodies on "Body And Soul", his intervallic leaps on "Alone Together" and his playing weaving of dissonance, counterpoint and swing on Thelonious Monk's "Monk's Dream". While respecting the harmonic contours and deeply ingrained melodies of those oft-covered tunes, and others presented here on *Archtop Avenue*, Zjaca puts his own personal stamp on them through reharmonization, subtle rhythmic shifts and improvisational flights. Recording each track with a different archtop guitar, he interprets these beloved standards, and a few originals, with taste and invention. Always mindful of addressing the bass line while delivering rich chord voicings and spinning fluid melody lines, he strikes a delicate balancing act on these 12 tunes from *Archtop Avenue*.

"Doing a solo guitar album has been in my head for a long time," he said. "Playing solo guitar is the most demanding form of expression on the instrument because you are completely musically naked and there is no one to cover or help you. And on the other hand, there is enormous freedom and the possibility of expression, but it requires great discipline and concentration. That is why there are not many solo jazz guitar albums." Ratko added that he tuned his various guitars down for this session. "On the whole album I play the guitar lowered by half a step because I like that sound of the instrument the most for solo playing."

A must have for all guitar aficionados and lovers of archtop guitars.