

Hailing from Norway, Ketil Strand is an expert guitarist specializing in adult contemporary instrumentals. The new album, *II*, brings to life rock, pop, fusion, experimental, avant-garde, and new age genres that seem to coalesce without any trouble. Ketil plays various guitars and even a banjo on the new album. In addition, drum programming and electronic hand drums fill in the music with more textural elements. There are eleven total tracks, but one was written by Charles-Marie Widor.

"Nothing You Can Do About It" opens with a brisk electric guitar line that is joined by a little funky bass and drum percussion. The squawky electric guitar is richly textured and features high and low squeals for a true rock performance. The instrumental tune contains a repeated melody that is punchy and vibrant overall. There is almost a Southern rock feel to the music. However, the music is probably anthemic instrumental rock at its finest.

"PM" begins with a scintillating acoustic guitar melody unaccompanied by other instruments or sounds. There are a few overlapping acoustic guitar notes that resemble classical guitar works with a little flamenco style notes. The entire track is rather soft and reserved with bright guitar notes characteristic of the smooth jazz or classical guitar genres. The track ends as sweetly as it begins with soft, twinkling guitar notes.

"DADGAD" opens with a spritely guitar line with the song's title being the actual notes used. The swift fingering style is joyous and fresh. There are twinkling notes that are softly played with some picking styles that let the notes wring out and reverberate. However, the music is mostly acoustic and not particularly electric guitar-focused. Still, the music is pleasant and a much needed rest from the other amped up tracks. This showcases Ketil's more subtle and quiet side with no complaints.

"What" begins with an anthemic electric guitar solo that is squawky and features rock percussion a few seconds in. The pulsating percussion and wildly-played electric guitar with bass is an amped up track with rock instrumental greatness. If the Trans-Siberian Orchestra played with Van Halen, you would get "What." The last few seconds of the track slow down and shed the percussion. Still, the track is mostly a rock instrumental with typical bass and percussion.

"Overdrive" begins with a fast, amped-up rock instrumental with squawky electric guitars and a groovy bass beat. The drum displays are top-notch and the punchy bass keeps the music flowing along. The rock guitar solos are not continuous throughout, but they are a primary mode of sound on the track. Mid-song, there are fast and clear guitar notes that seem continuous for a moment, but the flow is broken by rests and full-on rock percussion. This is an adventurous track with wild sounds and a steady beat.

"Repeat After Me" opens with a light electric guitar melody that is repeated a few times and a guitar is added for each repeat, which adds a good amount of sonic textures. There is some improvisational expertise that shows mid-song. The layering and programming creates an engaging and somewhat hypnotic result that is rather lucid throughout.

Ketil Strand's sophomore release, aptly-titled II, is Ketil's second release of experimental and visionary guitar music. The guitar is the focal point here with many tracks showcasing rock, classical, experimental, and new age fusion genres. The rock guitar mode is joined by more acoustic guitars throughout the album, which provides a sense of relaxation amidst the busy-ness. However, Ketil produces a fine recording of instrumental guitar music that joins the greatness of the late-Shawn Lane.

Review by Matthew Forss

Rating: 5 Stars (out of 5)