



Spiritual Hymns

Dominique DiPiazza | Canaan Music (2002)

By Phil DiPietro

While the 43-year-old French bassist (and with this recording, guitarist!) Dominique DiPiazza can claim moderate name recognition in jazz circles and a bit higher notoriety in jazz-fusion circles; it's among the bassists of the world, some of them the world's foremost players, that his name is the stuff of legend. It's not just his ungodly (poor choice of adjectives-read on) chops and his short list of super-high-end musical associates that contribute to his folkloric nature, it's his bona fide status as one of the music's true enigmatic figures.



After a stretch of nine years with no appearances on any commercial recordings whatsoever, Dominique recently added to his mythic status by returning to the scene last year in a "roisserie league" power trio, called "Front Page" (their self-titled debut is on Emarcy/Universal), with Bireli Lagrene and Dennis Chambers, nabbing the award for Jazz Album of the Year in France at the annual Victoires de la Musique awards (this is the equivalent of a Grammy award in the US). Why was Dominique absent from the music scene for those nine years? After touring with John McLaughlin in support of *Que Alegria*, the only recording with Dominique, including *Front Page*, that has been released in the US, he elected to leave the music world for seven years, during the first four of which he did not touch an instrument! He left music to become a Pastor, and emphasize matters of church and family. Only recently has he returned to music, and adding to his cloak of mystery, admittedly does so only as a second career.

Now comes *Dominique DiPiazza Plays Spiritual Hymns* a disc with some elements that no doubt will confound his fan base and others that will leave them breathless. Here he looks to the spiritual repertoire for musical and- well- spiritual inspiration. He also looks toward the focal point of his activities within the church, the orphan children of the world, for inspiration. The sole text in the cd jacket, other than the song listings, dedicates it "... to all the children of the world who suffer in silence-to all the children who will never know what it means to play, or eat until they are satisfied." Let's say the depths of this dedication go a little further than similar ones you might see on the pop-star-of-the-moment's cd. They say you have to live the blues to play the blues. In Dominique's case, let's just say here, you have to live the love to play the love. The dedication that he's put into his work as a pastor and the things he must have seen in his journey resonate through this recording. Another quality that resonates throughout, in his guitar playing especially, originates from a facet of his upbringing I was unaware of until recently. Dominique was raised in a gypsy camp and has thoroughly absorbed the traditions of that guitar style, including its signature component- quite simply- warp-speed arpeggiation. In addition to his career as fusion bassist he is also a respected Djangoesque plectrist, having performed at major European gypsy festivals.

So yes, Dominique is truly inspired and conveys inspiration and yes again, one of the tools he uses to convey it is sheer, unabashed technical facility. Dominique's also been listening to flamenco, as you'll pick up on after hearing his version of "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," featuring a Paco-worthy intro on steel-string, the massive tone of his fretless bass implying a church organ sound and overdubbed bass playing the melody for a majestic two minutes.

Known for his right hand technique on bass, which incorporates the thumb and index finger solely, he uses a thumb pick on steel-stringed guitar, with various other supplementary digits, to get his point across. There is absolutely no compromising of the music on the guitar's end of things, as Dominique proves to be (ahem)—let's say more than capable. The most succinct way to put it is that it sounds like Dominique and Bireli went into the studio to record some spiritual music, but Dominique is the only person on the disc! Among Dominique's huge bag of influences are the Cameroonian musicians of Lyon, and you can hear that joyful bounce in the bass on the uptempo arrangement of "How Great Thou Art" that ensues after a two

minute intro, voiced solely on the bass and containing a bop guitar - like chord solo. That bounce is also there on "What a friend we have in Jesus," which is highlighted by two choruses of high-octane bass soloing with an absolutely transparent, woody tone. "O, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus" features the growling fretless "mwah" that Dominique is capable of achieving on fretted basses while utilizing a bridge-mounted device of his own invention. Descending crystalline arpeggiations are achieved on guitar, with a briskness of attack that sound aided by fingerpicks. Do we really need another version of "Amazing Grace" If it's transformed into a pointed piquant jazz waltz with a descending chord progression on the bass and altered, yet not darkly so, reharmonized chords in the melody, it's fine with me. Not overplayed or overworked- just a magic little two minutes and forty seconds. "It is Well With My Soul" again showcases arpeggio chops on both instruments with freakish bass fills and church bells provided by bass harmonics at tune's end. The closer, "There's Something About That Name," is this album's "Maria" (Dominique's signature tune and feature on Que Allegria), with a melody voiced on bass that turns into a liquid solo section featuring descending sliding arpeggio fragments and his flawless articulation. Throughout, Dominique makes the case for voicing a song's melody on bass rather than guitar and for emphasizing melody and brevity in the spiritual genre, all the while imbuing each tune with rhythm without benefit of percussion.

I, for one, will use this music as a backdrop to pray for more from Dominique in any genre he is willing to devote is substantial gifts. Hopefully, his second career will continue in conflict-free, synergistic coexistence with the first, and occasionally even benefit from a shift in priority. In the meantime, get his new disc via the internet from Canaan Music at www.dominiquedipiazza.com

Track listing: 1.O, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus, 2. How Great Thou Art, 3.Amazing Grace, 4. O Sacred Head, Now Wounded, 5.What a friend we have in Jesus, 6.Be Exalted, O God, 7.My Jesus, I Love Thee, 8. It is Well With My Soul, 9.In Moments Like These, 10. The Old Rugged Cross 11. There's Something About That Name

Personnel: Dominique DiPiazza- electric bass, acoustic,steel-string, guitar

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