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**John Pizzarelli
Trio**

Live At Birdland

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★★★★½

Guitarist and

vocalist John Pizzarelli knows how to work an audience. *Live At Birdland* features Pizzarelli in his element, working a room with the same nimble charm he brings to the standards he croons. Banter aside, Pizzarelli proves he can craft a song into a personal statement like few other artists. From James Taylor's "Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight" to a barnburning "Stompin' At The Savoy," Pizzarelli possesses both a voice that hints at the legacy of entertainers who have come before him and a touch on guitar that reflects the indelible tutelage of his father, Bucky Pizzarelli.

The younger Pizzarelli's dedicated study and knowledge of the canon of jazz standards also clearly translates into his own writing. Among his quintet of original offerings on *Live At Birdland*, "Oh, How My Heart Beats For You" noticeably stands out while at the same time comfortably rubbing shoulders with the George and Ira Gershwin classic "They Can't Take That Away From Me." Similarly, pianist Ray Kennedy contributes two of his own inventive originals, "Gospel Truth" and "Tea For Tatum." Brother and bassist Martin Pizzarelli capably shares his passion for the family business on the bandstand, solidly anchoring the album from start to finish.

Whether he's offering a slyly swinging rendering of "It's Only A Paper Moon" or recounting Kennedy's starstruck stage encounter with Dizzy Gillespie at the age of 14, John Pizzarelli understands that his patrons want both entertainment and the intimacy of being in the loop. Though some might protest the eight-minute comedic mugging of "I Like Jersey Best"—a cavalcade of impressions and musical send-ups that range from Sting to Billie Holiday—it's all part and parcel of Pizzarelli's charisma as a performer. After all, a little shtick never hurt anyone.

—John Kreicbergs

Live At Birdland: Disc 1—Just You, Just Me; The Firm From Sauce; This Song Is You; Isn't It A Pity?; Rhode Island; Gospel Truth; Tea For Tatum; Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight; Mean Old Man; Manhattan; Moonlight Becomes You; Will You Still Be Mine? (68:41); Disc 2—Three Little Words; They Can't Take That Away From Me; Oh, How My Heart Beats For You; The Day I Found You; It's Only a Paper Moon; Stompin' At The Savoy; Better Run Before It's Spring; Headed Out To Vera's; Medley: Gee Baby, Ain't I Good To You/Baby, Baby All the Time/Midnight Blue; I Like Jersey Best; My Castle's Rockin'; Baby Just Come Home To Me. (65:12)

Personnel: John Pizzarelli, guitar, vocals; Ray Kennedy, piano; Martin Pizzarelli, bass.

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