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Michael Landau - "Organic Instrumentals"



Michael Landau - "Organic Instrumentals" CD Review by Scott Thomas

Michael Landau is perhaps the most widely respected session guitarist of all time. On "Organic Instrumentals", he once again proves to be the ultimate connoisseur of taste and tone as he navigates a cinematic assortment of musical landscapes.

Well, I'm sitting here listening to the New Michael Landau CD "Organic Instrumentals" and I'm totally chillin' to the first tune "Delano". The song starts out w/ a cool breezy acoustic jazzy-type melody line and as the song progresses, it moves into a groovy electric guitar vibe with some of the best cutting distortion lead blues tone I've heard in awhile. One moment you are floating on some contemporary jazz ala George Benson and in a blink of an eye you are visiting Electric Lady Land... The electric guitar-vibe is a cross between Hendrix and Stevie Ray. The main melody line sounds like it could be the musical theme to a hit television show like "Friends" or "Cheers" or something in that realm of music... I'm totally dig'n the contrast of soundz here.

Sneaker Wave – Now this is definitely out there in left field... The guitar soundz are out of this world. Landau goes from hippy-trippy hypnotic melodies to wide open

reverberated harmonic chord progressions that remind me allot of Eric Johnson. The lead lines are dynamic, exciting and soulful. This is inspiring to say the least.

Spider Time - Backward guitarz and again a Hendrix sounding melodic chord-structure with one single straight-ahead beat on the ol' toms. Man oh man, this kat Landau has got some chops. This has an early Mark Knofler feel to it. The Keys on this are also top-notch. I love that Wurlitzer sound. The music is moving and has a very reflective vibe in itz mist.

Landau constructs some of the most melodically beautiful phrases ever recorded with passion drenched guitar solos, resulting in a guitar tour de force that must be heard to be believed.

The Big Black Bear - I think the words here are "g-force"... The music pulls you one minute and then propels you the next. You actually pull some g-forces on this one while listening. The lead lines couldn't get any sweeter sounding either. I feel a little dizzy after this flight in the aural skies of Landau and company.

Karen Mellow - I can say one thing for sure. Michael Landau is DEEP ! I mean his music reaches the deepest levels of my unconsciousness real-estate that I thought I never had. No kiddin' right ...?! I don't know what kind of amps he uses, but his guitars sounds are so smooth and classy. The music has many highs and lows in it. The sounds go from very mellow to bombastically loud in an instance, giving you a rollercoaster type of effect.

Acting as both engineer and producer, Landau is a master craftsman, working the recording console with the same artistry with which he approaches playing the guitar

As far as the rest of the Album goes, there are plenty more interesting arrangements and impressive guitar-hero type playing. The music is all rock/blues oriented with jazz fusion undertones, laced and interwoven into to Landau's fabric of sound. Moreover, "Tone" is your thing, then this CD is Pure Tone Paradise.

There is know denying it, Michael Landau is a Master Harmonic Craftsman of Sound with a guitar in his hands. I highly recommend this CD for your listening pleasure.





The Michael Landau Group: Organic Instrumentals (2012)

By [JOHN KELMAN](#), Published: March 16, 2012

What do [Joni Mitchell](#), [James Taylor](#) and Neil Diamond have in common? Well, aside from being amongst the more important singer/songwriters of the past forty years, they've all recruited Michael Landau at one time or another. Between hundreds of recordings and plenty of high profile tours, it's more than a little surprising that the guitarist hasn't become a household name. Still, success needn't be measured solely on popular recognition; Landau's already achieved plenty as a guitarist's guitarist—a musician's

musician whose broad vernacular makes him capable in virtually any context. As a leader, his discography is admittedly light, but he's ramped up recently with *Live* (Tone Center, 2006), from his own fusion/blues-oriented group, and the similarly rock/vocal-driven *Renegade Creation* (Tone Center, 2010) collective, with guitarist [Robben Ford](#), bassist [Jimmy Haslip](#) and drummer [Gary Novak](#). What Landau's discography has been missing, however, is an all-instrumental record, and with *Organic Instrumentals*, he's righted that serious wrong.

And what a stellar record it is. Landau shuffles the rhythm section amongst a bunch of largely well-known friends, but what lends *Organic Instrumentals* its consistency, strength and authenticity—beyond the guitarist's tasty playing, effortless control over effects and verisimilitude across electric and acoustic instruments—is organist [Larry Goldings](#). No stranger in the jazz world for his work with guitarists [John Scofield](#) and [Peter Bernstein](#)—but first hooking up with Landau in James Taylor's touring band—Goldings' helps define *Organic Instrumentals'* overall tenor on all but two tracks: "The Big Black Bear," where Landau's whammy bar-driven chords and sweet Fender tone work a space somewhere between guitarists [Derek Trucks](#) and [Jimmy Herring](#); and "The Family Tree," a roots-driven solo that, moving seamlessly from acoustic to tremolo-driven electric guitar, provides a gentle coda to this largely incendiary set.

Between Goldings and Landau's own inestimable chops, *Organic Instrumentals* could have been a more clearly defined jazz recording, but that would misrepresent the guitarist's multifarious interests. Instead, not unlike Herring and the legendary [Jeff Beck](#), *Organic Instrumentals* is more rock instrumental—but, with its greater harmonic sophistication and chops, one that simply could not have been made by anyone living solely in that world.

The grooves are deep, but this is more than just a collection of contexts for soaring solos;



Organic Instrumentals is also a writer's record. The dobro-driven "Delano," thundering "Sneaker Wave," sneakier "Spider Time" and fusion-centric "Karen Mellow" all possess memorable themes and changes to navigate, but at their core sits Landau, who—with rare features for Goldings and, on the album's most jazz-informed track, "Big Sur Howl," flugelhornist/[Frank Zappa](#) alum [Walt Fowler](#)—grabs nearly all the solo space.

Landau stretches out considerably, but decades of studio sessions with inherently limited space mean that every note of every solo counts—each part of an overriding and spontaneous form. That would be enough to make *Organic Instrumentals* a success, but Landau's compelling writing, coupled with a terrific cadre of players, makes it more than just Landau's best solo album to date. Deserving to push his visibility to the next level, *Organic Instrumentals* is an early contender for one of the year's best rock-infused instrumental records.

Track Listing: Delano; Sneaker Wave; Spider Time; The Big Black Bear; Karen Mellow; Ghouls and Goblins; Bug Sur Howl; Woolly Mammoth; Smoke; Family Tree.

Personnel: Michael Landau: guitar; Larry Goldings: organ (1-3, 5-9), piano (3), Estey reed organ (9), carillion (9); Jimmy Haslip: bass (1, 3); Charley Drayton: drums (1, 8); Vinnie Colaiuta: drums (2); Teddy Landau: bass (2); Gary Novak: drums (3-7); Andy Hess: bass (4, 5, 8); Chris Chaney: bass (6); Walt Fowler: flugelhorn (7).

Record Label: [Tone Center](#)

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The Michael Landau Group - Organic Instrumentals (Album Review)



review by Iain P W Robertson

Lyrical bias has always been my musical bag, even though I recognise that stellar guitarmanhood ought to lie behind song-writing genius. Therefore, listening to Michael Landau's latest oeuvre, 'Organic Instrumentals', I could not help but feel that some lyrics ought to be added. As a modestly talented wordsmith, I should like to offer my services (I can perceive the O2 dates already).

Yet, as Landau is commonly regarded as one of the most widely respected session guitarists of an era, his new ten track album does warrant listening to. Personally, I can derive great pleasure from the combined efforts of Steve Howe, Darryl Stuermer, Robert Cray, the remarkable BB King and even the 'new boy on the block', Joe Bonamassa. Landau fits that bill to perfection.

Mind you, he ought to, having recorded or played with artists as diverse as Miles Davis, Seal, Pink Floyd, Mariah Carey, Quincy Jones, Diana Ross, Rod Stewart, James Taylor and Jefferson Airplane. His band, which consists of the drumming talents of Gary Novak, Charley Drayton and Vinny Colaiuta, allied to bassists Chris Chaney and Andy Hess and the flexible fingers of legendary Hammond specialist, Larry Gouldings, can also boast strident CVs from working with many of the world's top musical performers.

As with most guitar breaks, it is not so much the introductions to each of the ten titles in the CD listing but the explosive, soaring strings that occur at some point into each track. The anticipation builds, awaiting the inevitable 'solo' assault, which, it needs to be said, does not arrive on 'Karen Mellow' (05:25; track 5), which is as the musical title suggests and is probably too luxuriantly laid back in any case.

Fortunately, most of the other titles also live up to their names sonically (difficult, without lyrics). Landau strides through the melancholia of opening gambit, 'Delano', makes a minor impact on the second track, 'Sneaker Wave', but really gets the hammer down with the spookily titled and lengthy 'Spider Time' (07:42), which also gives vent to the tightly skinned snare of Gary Novak and the subtly incessant Hammond organ of Larry Gouldings, a sound peppering that is always welcome.

One of the biggest surprises weighs in with 'Big Sur Howl', the seventh track on the CD, which features the flugelhorn of Walt Fowler, in a strongly jazz orientated listing. While there is a distinct southern vibe to 'Smoke' (track 9; 03:32), which almost permeates your nostrils, the complexity and brevity of the final track, 'The Family Tree' (03:09), underscores the brilliance of Landau as a consummate guitar-playing tour de force.

As a collaboration of some of the veterans of the musical scene, possessing a strong blues bias across the work, there is plenty at which to marvel. The sound is as subtle as you want it to be and the melodious nature of many of the phrases and tones chosen is mellifluously charming. You don't have to be a cinema fan to appreciate a great and varied musical backdrop.