

Guitar Band

by Bob Reynolds

review by Scott Gordon

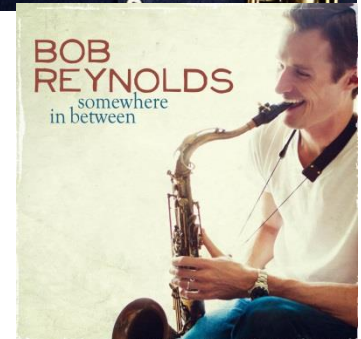
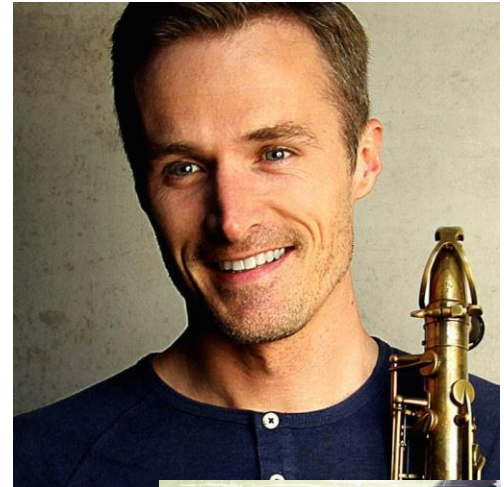
Bob Reynolds is a Los Angeles-based saxophonist, mostly known for his work with John Mayer and Snarky Puppy, as well as his 'vlogs' and videos on YouTube, where

he has 33 thousand subscribers. He has been the recipient of many accolades, including 4 ASCAP Young Jazz Composer Awards, a Grammy award for Best Contemporary Instrumental Album in 2016 with Snarky Puppy, and having a previous self-released album ([Somewhere In Between](#)) debut at #1 on the iTunes Jazz chart.

Though he is often typecast as a jazz fusion player (likely due to his involvement with the world's most popular band of that genre, Snarky Puppy), he is truly a pioneer who is very hard to categorize into one genre. He is an expert at mixing and fusing genres ranging from jazz, to fusion, to rock, to hip-hop, etc.

At the moment, *Guitar Band* is Bob Reynolds' second most recent album, released in March of 2017. It features Bob

Reynolds on tenor sax, Nir Felder (top right) on guitars, Kaveh Rastegar (bottom left) on bass, and Robert 'Sput' Searight (bottom right) on drums. On his website, Bob gives a wonderful explanation of how this album came into existence:



“This record happened by accident.

I had a night booked at The Blue Whale—a killer jazz club in Los Angeles—but hadn’t yet selected a band. While touring with Snarky Puppy, I got talking with Mark and Sput about NAMM (a music convention held each January, south of Los Angeles). They were both going to be in town for it so I asked them to join me at the Whale. Then I asked Kaveh (bassist in Kneebody, among other bands). We’d performed together recently and I was looking for an excuse to play again. Then I found out Nir (who I’d been playing with for awhile) was going to be in town from New York. Perfect! This was my chance to experiment with a two-guitar band.



Ever since playing in John Mayer’s band, I’d wanted to lead a guitar-based group. John had three guitarists (including himself) in his touring band. This meant a lush cushion of guitar-y goodness enveloped every solo I played. Imagine the best mattress and pillow combination you’ve ever experienced. It feels like that. But of course, it’s not just the guitar. It’s the player.

Excited by the idea of this group, I decided to borrow a page from the Snarky Puppy playbook and film it. There was one catch: we had no time to rehearse, and barely a sound check. I’d played with each of these guys in different scenarios, but never as a unit. So we set up in a circle, surrounded by an audience and five cameras, and played these tunes together for the first time. No pressure! I thought we might get two or three good videos out of it. We got more. Alex Chaloff and his team captured not only gorgeous video but stunning audio. When I heard the result I realized this needed to be its own album. So here it is. Live. Raw. Filled with an energy that comes only from tight-rope walking in front of an audience. My younger self would hear only the “mistakes.” My current-age-self hears the magic. I hope you hear it, too. “

The songs on *Guitar Band* are generally structured the way most jazz songs are arranged, beginning with a ‘head’ (or the main melody/theme), followed by a solo section where some/all members of the band improvise solos, and ending with the ‘head’ again. However, they are not purely jazz songs; as with most of Bob’s music, they are the product of many inspirations from many different genres.



Songs:

Unlucky: The opening track of this album, “Unlucky”, has a very interesting backstory. Essentially, Bob Reynolds took the 4-chord loop from Daft Punk’s “Get Lucky” (a dance/pop hit from 2013), put it into a different key, slowed it down, and wrote the rest of this song around those four chords, as he explained in a recent YouTube vlog. The result is wonderful ballad, full of expression and emotion. For me, the highlight of this track is the ending, where the full band builds perfectly from a soft, sentimental reprise of the melody, up into an intense, passionate, heartfelt climax.



Official video for Unlucky: https://youtu.be/o84hxZrS_xA

Blues for Charlie: At first, this was my least favorite song on the album, but after a second listen, I began to love it. The melody is very bluesy, yet modern, not to mention catchy, and the whole band is completely locked into the groove for the whole song. The highlight of this track is definitely Bob’s sax solo in the middle of the song, particularly around 6:00 into the song, where he briefly quotes a bizarre, yet haunting melody, which is quickly evaporated away by a guitar line played in response. Soon afterwards, Bob and both guitarists ‘trade off’ short solos, and all three players play blisteringly fast runs, which perfectly showcases their talent.

Official video for Blues for Charlie: <https://youtu.be/kaodjtrWbW4>

Crush: Though rather long, this song overall is one of the highlights of Guitar Band. Throughout the song, particularly while playing solos, Bob shows off his tremendous music vocabulary, improvising with licks and lines borrowed from rock, pop, hip-hop, and standard jazz, while he masterfully blends all of these influences into spectacular melodies. Nir Felder plays an excellent guitar solo, and seamlessly transitions between playing in the styles of jazz, rock, and fusion, while effortlessly playing technically challenging improvised runs and lines. Another notable part of this track is how the guitars, bass, and drums all perfectly lock into the groove throughout the song, even during the more “adventurous” and “experimental” sections, where most bands would begin to unintentionally play out of time.

Official video for Crush: <https://youtu.be/lrhxJU57AIM>

Mulholland: “Mulholland” opens with a rather long unaccompanied, mostly improvised sax intro from Bob Reynolds, based around a simple fragment of a melody. This lasts until around 2:45, where the rest of the band comes in, and the main melody is introduced. At the end, the band stops playing, leaving Bob to play unaccompanied once again, and he begins to play and improvise in a very similar pattern to the intro, which ties up the song nicely.

Official video for Mulholland: https://youtu.be/1SUKWS_xP_s

Down South: This is personally my favorite song on the album. Overall, the composition, atmosphere, and solos are all top-notch, and I think this song perfectly shows the immense talent that all of these musicians possess. Ironically, this is also the only song with an obvious error, which is made especially clear if you watch the video of when it was recorded. The track starts with a moody, locked-in groove from the rhythm section, which is soon accompanied by a creative melody from Bob. Between this section and the solo section, the aforementioned error occurs when the band loses track of the beat, but they recover quite gracefully, with only a few chuckles from the audience (2:05).

The solo section is full of creative and impressive solos, and Robert 'Sput' Searight on drums showcases his talent and creativity as an improviser quite well, doing an excellent job of responding to the style that each player is intending. The song ends with the main theme/melody again (which is a standard structure for jazz songs), and the song ends with the same moody, angsty atmosphere as the beginning of the song.

Official video for Down South: <https://youtu.be/uE8vsCnJDdc>

Can't Wait for Perfect: This song opens with a great groove from Kaveh and 'Sput' on bass and drums, soon joined by the two guitarists. Then Bob Reynolds chimes in with a powerful melody, which utilizes effectively dynamics (volume) to help convey its intensity. Following this, he improvises a blistering solo over top of the groove from the rhythm section. Throughout his solo, he yet again shows his influences quite clearly, using fast pentatonic licks borrowed from classic rock, sultry blues licks, and fast rhythmic passages quoted from rap (such as 3:45-4:00), while Mark Lettieri's guitar solo afterwards shows off his knowledge of and passion for blues and rock. Meanwhile, Kaveh's bass line is similar to a common pattern found in Jazz (especially Latin Jazz), and 'Sput' utilizes many different styles of drumming throughout the song. All of the influences and musical quotes from the band members help to express the power of mixing genres together, which is an important part of Bob Reynolds' style in his music, particularly this album.

Official video for Can't Wait for Perfect: <https://youtu.be/0fO6BYuMleE>

The songs of this album are all unique and wonderful in their own way. The ability of the members of the 'Guitar Band' to play with such passion, emotion, and skill all together, especially as it was their first time playing together, is very impressive. Each song seems to be able to pull out a new emotion out of the band, from sadness, to anger, to pure joy, to maniacal genius. Additionally, throughout the album, each member of the band had many opportunities to showcase their talent and musicality, and they all utilized those opportunities to the full extent. The outcome of the immense talent in this band was a truly great piece of art.

Overall, *Guitar Band* is a massively underrated album. I consider it a masterpiece of modern jazz fusion, and it is definitely among my favorite albums of all time. However, it is not even remotely 'mainstream' or popular; consequently, I wrote this review in hopes of spreading this album out to a wider audience, not just fans of semi-obscure jazz and fusion. For my fellow musicians, this album is a masterclass in groove and modern improvisation, and is definitely something to intently study. Regardless of whether or not you are an instrumentalist, this album is simply amazing. I highly recommend you give it a listen.

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