



John Scofield. Interview by Arturo Mora Rioja

John Scofield is touring Europe. He has just finished a series of concerts with his trio (Steve Swallow on bass and Bill Stewart on drums). After resting for only a day he has started the Medeski Scofield Martin & Wood tour which will bring him to Spain. Arturo Mora had the chance of interviewing the legendary guitarist via an e-mail questionnaire.



John Scofield
C.M.U. San Juan Evangelista,
Madrid

Arturo Mora Rioja: You have just released *Juice*, your new collaboration with Medeski Scofield Martin & Wood. What can you tell us about the album?

John Scofield: I think it may be our best album as a band. Our ability to communicate and work together only improves as the years go by. I don't know. They're all different. But then, albums can be viewed like children. If you have four or five kids, it doesn't mean that one should be necessarily be compared to the others. They're just offspring from the same parents. But then, maybe parenting skills improve with practice?

Arturo Mora Rioja: Which are the main differences between *Juice* and your previous studio works with MMW, *A Go Go* (1998) and *Out Louder* (2006)?

John Scofield: *A Go Go* was my album as a leader. I wrote all the tunes. *Out Louder* – we wrote a lot together and featured some free improvised pieces. *ICTWCIM [In Case the World Changes Its Mind* (2011)] is live material. With *Juice*, we tried to stick with rhythms from the African diaspora. We also each individually brought in tunes and suggested covers.



Medeski Scofield Martin & Wood

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Arturo Mora Rioja: You are right now in the middle of an European tour. What chief differences can you highlight between European and American audiences?

John Scofield: I think European audiences are very used to listening to music as works of art, not solely as entertainment. Not at home where entertainment is king. I like both art and entertainment actually and strive to offer both.

Arturo Mora Rioja: Apart from the obvious tribute you paid to New Orleans music in *Piety Street* (2009), the musical forms and rhythms of the Crescent City have played a very important part in your music, as can be heard, among others, in your recent *Überjam Deux* (2013). How did your connection with New Orleans begin?

John Scofield: Jazz was born in NOLA and I love jazz! The RnB from there is more swinging too. New Orleans is a special place – no other place like it in the world and those exceptional qualities translate into a unique music and

culture. My mother was born and raised there but sadly moved north in her 30's with the accent but not the fantastic cooking or music abilities.

Arturo Mora Rioja: Along the years you have shown an extraordinary skill to switch among different projects. What criteria do you use to decide what to do next?

John Scofield: I just go with my gut on this. I have to do what sets a spark off in me creatively and feels fresh. Even If I live another hundred years, I won't get to try all the configurations that are possible.



John Scofield & Scottish National Jazz Orchestra

Queen Elizabeth Hall, Londres

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Arturo Mora Rioja: Besides the aforementioned variety you have performed regularly with your trio for many years now. What can you say about Steve Swallow and Bill Stewart's contribution to your music?

John Scofield: We have a unique sound as a trio. It's not planned, it just evolved. All three of us have very personal ways of playing and it just works together. We're all up there

“doing our own thing” which happens to mesh well into a whole. I’ve learned so much from both Steve and Bill. We are an extremely compatible group both on and off the stage.

Arturo Mora Rioja: *A Moment’s Peace*, released in 2011, offers quite a relaxed approach. The musical environment is mellow and your improvisations leave a lot of space, showing great maturity. Do you think that record is a precise snapshot of who you are today as an artist? Could you have recorded it, let’s say, twenty years ago?

John Scofield: Probably not. I’m more relaxed now and can leave space. That’s so important in playing with others and making a group sound. I think that recordings are a snapshot of a day, a week, a period of time perhaps but they never fully define what someone is capable of. Sometimes though, a recording defines what a person is *not* capable of! (ha!)

Arturo Mora Rioja: The groove is a very important part of your music. I can recall concerts of yours in which part of the audience were dancing along the aisles and some people were tapping their feet and moving rhythmically in their seats, while others were only listening, as if it were classical music. How do you find these differing audience reactions? Have you got any prescriptive approach as to how you would like your music to be listened to?

John Scofield: Dance and tap if you want but you don’t have to. How one experiences music is a very personal thing and there are no rules.



Medeski Scofield Martin & Wood

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Arturo Mora Rioja: Among your most celebrated bands one could mention the different quartets with Joe Lovano. Please tell us about the musical sensations the saxophone quartet line up brings to you.

John Scofield: I've loved Joe's playing since we met in '72. He's an incredible player. A master. I've always tried to play guitar in a more linear fashion – like a sax or trumpet. When I play with a horn in the group, it alters my approach at times. I love to comp for them too!

Arturo Mora Rioja: In the past you have recorded outstanding albums with fellow guitarists Bill Frisell and Pat Metheny. Have you considered the idea of releasing a new project with another guitarist? Maybe Frisell or Metheny again?

John Scofield: Those guys are too expensive! No seriously I love playing with 2 guitars (or 3), but there are no plans for such a project.

Arturo Mora Rioja: Your sound is sometimes indebted to rock music, especially when you switch to a Fender guitar. Which rock guitarists have influenced you the most in the timbric aspect?

John Scofield: I guess Hendrix and Clapton from back in the 60's...and primarily BB King...I love Albert too.

Arturo Mora Rioja: In your jazzier projects you have been playing an Ibanez AS-200 for almost 30 years. Have you ever considered using another guitar as your main instrument?

John Scofield: Not yet and it's been more than 30 years. I have many great guitars at home but always come back to the AS200. It's tight friendship. We are very close and make a good team. I do the thinking and it does the talking.

Arturo Mora Rioja: You have recorded for the likes of Miles Davis, Chet Baker, Charles Mingus and McCoy Tyner. Among these historical jazz masters and others you have played with, who left the greatest impression on you?

John Scofield: I love them all, but don't forget Joe Henderson and Herbie. I have never played with Benny Golson. But since I spent nearly four years in Miles' band and listened to his music endlessly from the start of listening to any music, he influenced me the most.

Arturo Mora Rioja: What can you tell us about your future projects?

John Scofield: More *Uberjam*... and maybe a standards cd sooner than... .duos... trios... and more. That and combating the aging process!

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