

No Substitutions

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Larry Carlton & Steve Lukather (Favored Nations)

By Dave Hughes

For those who worship the guitar gods, this meeting of two of the axe's finest, recorded live in Osaka, naturally provides much incredible technique and balls-out fusion energy in which to revel. But many of the rest of us will find the date enjoyable, too. The first two tunes presented here are simply-structured jam vehicles, and Carlton and Lukather burn them up for all they're worth. The middle selection, "(It Was) Only Yesterday," provides gentle relief - it's a heart-on-your-sleeve ballad, with changes ripe for crying, blues-drenched expressiveness. Next, the duo tackles Miles Davis' "All Blues," finding all sorts of new things to do with these familiar changes. They close with Carlton's "Room 335," named for his home studio; it's a bouncy, contemporary jazz treat.

Both men are veterans of thousands of L.A. sessions and can adapt to a widerange of musical situations, but Lukather (formerly of Toto) favors a hard-driving rock edge, while Carlton (formerly of the Crusaders and currently with Fourplay) employs a gentler jazz/blues touch. It's interesting (and quite enjoyable) to compare their distinctive approaches to their solos in each song. Lukather hits hard, with testosterone-fueled intensity. Carlton usually opts for finesse, yet his caressing massages have just as much impact.

During one of the song intros, Lukather states that this isn't a "guitar battle," as the club marquee proclaimed; rather, it's a pairing based on mutual respect and friendship. He twice refers to Carlton as "sensei," or teacher. And it's true; while chops are displayed with reckless abandon, there's no sense of competitiveness or "cutting" here. It's just plain fun. And I sense that it's an opportunity for both men to play what they really want to play, not what the demands of the studio, the record labels, or the radio programmers dictate. By the way, this label, Favored Nations, was founded by another guitar god, Steve Vai, so I'm sure this program is exactly what this record label wanted! (Favored Nations FNP2061)