



JULIAN LAGE *MODERN LORE*

“There’s a disarming spirit of generosity in the musicianship of Julian Lage, and a keener sense of judicious withholding. A guitarist with roots tangled up in jazz, folk, classical and country music, he has spent most of his life bathed in a bright, expectant light.”

– *New York Times*

On *Modern Lore*, Julian Lage’s second studio recording with his trio, the composer and guitarist focuses on the groove, building his melodies and solos around the work of the prodigious rhythm section of double bassist **Scott Colley** and drummer **Kenny Wollesen**. *Modern Lore* finds Lage playfully flipping the script he followed on his acclaimed 2016 Mack Avenue debut, *Arclight*. That album — produced, like *Modern Lore*, by Lage’s friend and collaborator, the singer-songwriter **Jesse Harris** — was his first trio set on electric guitar and found Lage inspired by the sounds and the attitude of the freewheeling, pre-bebop jazz era, when, as he puts it, “country music and jazz and swing were in this weird wild-west period.” This time he incorporates the sensibility, if not the outright sound, of early rock and roll, a similarly hybrid form driven by rhythm, personality and a passion for the electric guitar.

“Last time it was specifically a combination of the electric guitar being a lead voice interacting with those pre-bebop songs. I wanted to do a jazz record the way I had always craved to do one,” Lage recalls. “*Modern Lore* is the evolution of that sound, through the lens of original compositions. These pieces are more designed in the image of early rock and roll, early Little Richard, early Bo Diddley, wherein the first measure of music sets the tone for the whole experience. The sound of the band driven by these grooves and the guitar is more of an explosive voice, it bends more; it’s more dynamic.”

Opening with the exuberant “The Ramble,” Lage’s set of all-original new material is largely up-tempo, though on tracks like “Atlantic Limited” and “Splendor Riot” the trio adopts a hypnotic, lyrical stride. And, on “Revelry” and “Pantheon,” it grows more pensive. Throughout, the beat is concise and steady. Lage’s solos are action-packed musical monologues, stuffed with brilliant melodies and off-the-cuff inspiration. The penultimate track, “Earth Science,” is an outright scorcher.

“I wanted all the songs on this album to be borne out of a danceable groove, a kind of sensuality, something that felt great even before the guitar was a part of it,” Lage explains. “Kenny and Scott have this unique way of transforming these pieces, creating variations that morph into completely new feels. It’s kind of kaleidoscopic. With that in place, I wrote melodies that were singable to me.”

Lage was already an established guitar virtuoso when at age 27, he picked up the Telecaster for the *Arclight* sessions. That was, in a sense, a return to his roots: When he was four years old, his dad, a visual artist, had made him a plywood guitar, based on a Fender Esquire he’d traced from a Bruce Springsteen poster. As a young and preternaturally gifted musician, Lage found supporters in such artists as vibraphonist Gary Burton

and veteran jazz guitarist Jim Hall, who would become Lage's mentor and friend. Though Hall passed away in 2013, he remains a profound influence on Lage. In fact, Lage first encountered Colley and Wollesen when they were backing Hall at the famed Bay Area jazz club, Yoshi's in Oakland, CA. Since then, Lage has more than fulfilled the promise of his youth, collaborating with a diverse range of fellow artists, including guitarist-singer Chris Eldridge of Punch Brothers, bassist Steve Swallow, and iconic avant-garde composer John Zorn; often appearing with the house band on *Prairie Home Companion*; and composing for and fronting this trio.

For ***Modern Lore***, the trio cut the tracks at Reservoir Studios in midtown Manhattan. Then Lage brought in keyboardist Tyler Chester from the Blake Mills trio to add some very subtle textures. As Lage notes, "In the most tasteful way, Tyler brought a spirit to everything that really ignites the sonic palette." Tom Schick, Wilco's longtime engineer, mixed the album in Chicago and producer Jesse Harris contributes acoustic guitar on "Whatever You Say, Henry".

Once again, producer Harris was an important editorial voice, both arbiter and cheerleader. Says Lage, "Jesse and I shared a vision and a craving for a body of tunes that focused on directness and the space we could leave. We were adamant about keeping the music in that zone, that warmth and clarity, within which the beat of the song could really thrive. This was our dream for these songs."

"Every time I record with Scott and Kenny, I wish I could do this every day," Lage admits. "The sound I'm craving takes many forms; it can be very restrained or it can be wild and crazy. It kind of depends on the context. With ***Modern Lore***, the music sets the foundation for a multitude of directions, all rooted in a kind of sensual narrative."

As one of the most prodigious guitarists of his generation, Lage has long displayed an ability to explore a wide range of sounds, ideas and genres. But what delights him here — and will, in turn, captivate his listeners — is the artful simplicity of ***Modern Lore***.

Julian Lage · *Modern Lore*
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