



John Scofield

Blurbs

Scofield's muse has evolved from guitar standards to post-bop to fusion and back again. (He wears) a gilded robe as the modern messiah of "Terminator jazz."

Downbeat

...an incredibly resourceful display of devices and strategies...he just burned.

The New York Times

Scofield combines the chess-champ braininess of his solos with a taste for standard song forms and expansive bursts of volume...a manna for the straight ahead jazz fan.

The Boston Phoenix

Scofield's exercise of unconventional playing embraces the kind of musical exploration that drives jazz forward with optimism.

All About Jazz



Medeski Scofield Martin & Wood: In Case The World Changes Its Mind (2011)

By [JOHN KELMAN](#), Published: November 1, 2011

With significant pressure on artists to look for new territory to mine and new collaborations to explore, it's always great to see those that have worked well kept as ongoing concerns, like guitarist [John Scofield](#)'s first-encounter with jam band darlings Medeski, Martin & Wood on the superb *A Go Go* (Verve, 1998). The now-named Medeski Scofield Martin & Wood still reconvenes occasionally, with its follow-up, *Out Louder* (Indirecto, 2006), a more free-wheeling alternative to its predecessor's focus on Scofield's particularly fine writing. Five years later, *In Case The World Changes Its Mind* strikes the perfect balance between form and freedom.

Recorded on tour in 2006, while some of the same songs also appear on the European double-disc version of *Out Louder*, they're different versions. If that bonus, EP-length live disc gave fans a taste of MSMW in performance, then *In Case The World Changes Its Mind* is the real deal, its groove-laden, 115-minute set of 11 tunes equitably split between MSMW's two studio discs, with an extended jam thrown in for good measure, along with a gospel-drenched version of "Amazing Grace."

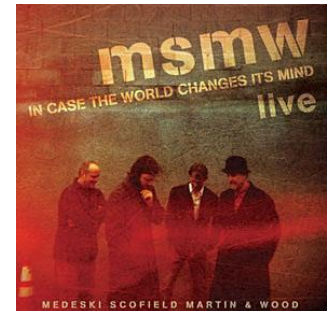
Scofield may be working his softer side lately on his relaxed *A Moment's Peace* (EmArcy, 2011), but he's in incendiary form here, in particular on a searing version of "Miles Behind," where his wah-driven guitar goes head-to-head with [John Medeski](#)'s grittily overdriven electric piano, bolstered by a nuclear groove from bassist Chris Wood and drummer [Billy Martin](#) that seems always on the edge of a precipice—threatening to dissolve into

complete anarchy at times, but always pulled back from the brink at the last possible moment.

Medeski's piano also drives the greasier title track, though he mixes it up with a melodica in the front line with Scofield, who's featured in an extended duo with the second line-informed Martin, the guitarist's complex voicings and angular phrases leading to some visceral slide playing. Both these songs from *Out Louder* are considerably expanded in length here; exemplifying one of MSMW's major MOs: taking ideas stemming from jams and turning them into tunes.

The material from *A Go Go* is given equal chance to expand, in particular the 11-minute set-closer, "Hottentot," where Medeski's swirling organ work is at its best, though his remarkable command over tone and texture—an analog fan's wet dream—is a cornerstones throughout. *A Go Go*'s title track is equally compelling, while a medley of that album's "Deadzy" and *Out Louder*'s "What Now" blends idiosyncrasy with straightforward boogie to great effect.

But the centerpiece of *In Case The World Changes Its Mind* is the 25-minute "Walter Hanuman," starting with a sprawling N'awlins jam that takes its good time getting to the core of *Out Louder*'s

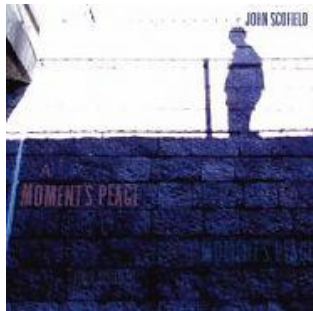


"Hanuman," stretching inexorably towards a fiery climax, only to wind down with an extended outro defined by Medeski's mad-scientist synth and Scofield's reverse-attack loops. MSMW may only convene occasionally, but with MMW driving Scofield to places he'd never find otherwise, and the guitarist lending MMW a stronger compositional focus, it's the perfect combination, with the whole of *In Case The World Changes Its Mind* clearly greater than the sum of its considerable parts.

Track Listing: CD1: A Go Go; Deadzy > What Now; Tootie Ma; Cachasa; In Case The World Changes Its Mind; Miles Behind. CD2: Walter Hanuman; Amazing Grace; Southern Pacific; Hottentot.

Personnel: John Medeski: keyboards; John Scofield: guitar; Bill Martin: basses; Chris Wood: drums, percussion.

Record Label: [Indirecto Records](#) | Style: [Jam Band](#)



John Scofield: A Moment's Peace

May 2nd, 2011 / Emarcy Records

A bona fide guitar hero and masterful improviser, John Scofield has covered a wide spectrum of musical styles with rare authority over the last four decades of his celebrated career. From funk and fusion to swinging jazz standards, rock-fueled jams, lush orchestral collaborations, earthy blues and old-time gospel music, Scofield has imbued each style with his distinctive six-string voice, earning accolades for his triumphs along the way.

On *A Moment's Peace*, his follow-up to 2009's gospel-drenched *Piety Street*, Scofield and his all-star crew of pianist/organist Larry Goldings (James Taylor, Norah Jones, Walter Becker), bassist Scott Colley (Jim Hall, Herbie Hancock, Pat Metheny) and drummer Brian Blade (Wayne Shorter, Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan) luxuriate in ballads associated with such legendary interpreters of song as Billie Holiday, Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and John Coltrane. Included in the collection, Scofield's third outing on EmArcy, are five new originals by the guitar great, along with soulful interpretations of the lyrical Lennon-McCartney number "I Will" and Carla Bley's serene "Lawns." "It's an album of slow, gentle music," says the perennial poll-winning guitarist. "But at the same time, we didn't want it to be easy listening. We tried to really play on all the tunes. For me, no matter what kind of music, it's really important that it be fresh and that we're really playing something. The creativity, when accompanying or soloing, has to be there."

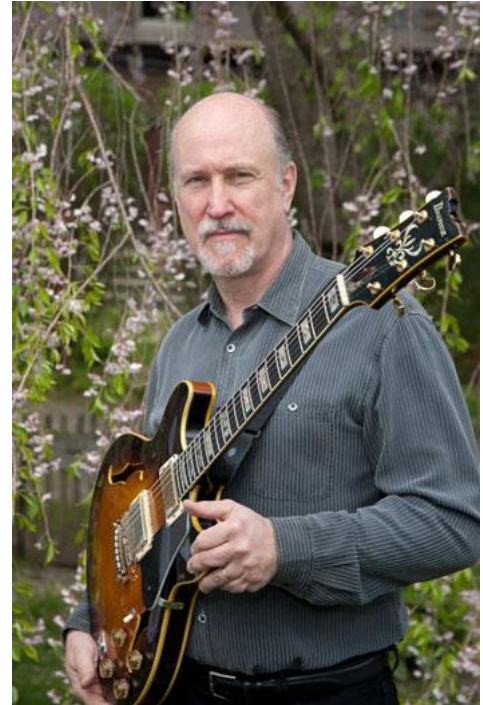
From sublime renderings of "I Want to Talk About You" and "You Don't Know What Love Is" to "Gee Baby Ain't I Good to You" and "I Loves You Porgy," Scofield fills each of these timeless gems with an uncommonly expressive approach to his instrument while stretching out in the tradition of the great melodic improvisers. And his highly interactive rhythm section, marked by Colley's formidable presence on bass, Goldings' thoughtful orchestrations on both piano and organ and Blade's sensitive, intuitive touch on the kit, helps make all of these tunes come alive in the moment. Scofield has high praise for his valued sidemen on *A Moment's Peace*. "Some guys are interactive in kind of a bulldozer way," he says. "But Scott, Larry and Brian are all able to be supportive of the music while making their personal contributions. There's a kind of a magic in that."

Interview: John Scofield - Taking It Slow

Jason Shadrick

*On the heels of his latest album, *A Moment's Peace*, we caught up with Sco to discuss his approach to ballads, the secret to playing slow and his favorite ballad performances.*

The art of effectively playing a ballad is a delicate thing. Balancing the sensitivity of a melody with the intense spirit of improvisation has been a constant struggle for musicians for eons. Within that struggle lies the excitement and challenge that guitarist John Scofield tackles with his latest album, *A Moment's Peace*. Over the course of a 30+ year career Scofield has tackled everything from cutting-edge fusion (*Blue Matter*) to down-and-dirty NOLA funk (*Flat Out*) and techno-jam-band grooves (*Überjam*). "A ballad album was just the next thing on my to-do list," says Scofield. Normally, a jazz ballads record is a collection of tried and true standards that have been recorded and performed countless times. With this album, Scofield took a slightly different approach by composing about half of the tunes on the album. "They sound like they could have lyrics, part of them anyways, and that's what I like about jazz ballads," mentions Scofield. That implied lyricism is demonstrated in the gentle bossa nova of "Simply Put" and within the folkloric nuances of "Plain Song."



More so than almost any of his other albums, Scofield's tone and phrasing is genuine and honest. He might not always wear his influences on his sleeve, but they are usually within arm's reach. Keeping things simple with little to no effects and a relatively clean tone, Scofield snakes through this set of tunes backed by longtime collaborator, keyboardist Larry Goldings, as well as bassist Scott Colley and drummer Brian Blade. "With ballads, you are always in danger of treading too lightly," states Scofield. Blade and Colley deftly handle that fine line with their always pulsating and propulsive accompaniment. We caught up with Sco to discuss his approach to ballads, the secret to playing slow and his favorite ballad performances.

You have covered a lot of stylistic ground over your career. What prompted you to do an album of ballads?

I really felt like now was the time. I feel like I'm able to do it now. When I was younger, I was more into playing hot. I'm still into that and trying to shred but I feel like I can actually *play* a ballad now.

Do you approach a ballad differently than other tunes?

It's completely different. Most of these, first of all, are songs. They have a melody and the melody reigns supreme, even when you are blowing on it the melody is always in your mind. The songs I wrote for this album follow that tradition too. It's really about trying to sing on your guitar. If I were to really oversimplify it I would say I just don't play so many notes. When you have a slow tempo, there's room for so much interpretation of the beat. You can play rubato over it, which is tricky because you always have to keep you place at the same time. You can also play a lot of fast stuff, which is what I got into on "I Want to Talk About You," which is a tune John Coltrane played. Mainly, I would say it's really just playing the song and your interpretation of it and letting the music breathe. This record is all about the four of us playing together. Also, you need to get a nice sound. When you're playing fast, it almost always doesn't matter what your guitar sounds like. Well, It doesn't matter as much, let's put it that way.

Did you have specific influences in mind for each song?

I didn't have them in mind, but for the songs that are vocal tunes, I learned them from somebody's performance. I did an Abbey Lincoln tune, "Throw it Away." The way she sings it is just in my mind. "Gee Baby, Ain't I Good to You," is all about Nat King Cole. It's just always there in the back of your head.

Many jazz musicians insist that you don't really know a ballad unless you know the lyrics. Did you write lyrics for your original tunes?

Nah, [laughs]. I don't have any secret lyrics. If I did, they would be obscene, let me tell ya. These songs are melodic pieces. Invariably, some overeager jazz singer who has just graduated from Ohio State or something, wants to put lyrics to your tune and you have to go, "Uh, I don't know if that fits." You just treat them as if they had words and just play melodically. Which is a whole another thing and then your phrasing and the way you hit the note, vibrato, dynamics, all of that stuff comes into play. How long do you sustain the note?

You mentioned earlier how you feel like you are just now learning how to play a ballad. What specifically do you notice about your playing that makes you feel that way?

When I listen back to my early records, one thing I really hear is that I didn't know how to get off a note. I knew how to hit it, but I didn't know how to end it. Part of that was because I didn't practice through an amp. When you are playing without an amp, it's just kind of dead and the note ends on its own faster. With an amp, you have a monster you must tame. There are a lot of things to think about when you are playing slowly that are really important and we all tend to over-emphasize this one aspect of playing really fast and getting that happening as if the slow stuff will take care of itself. The great lyrical guitar players, there's not that many, only a couple, but their technique is incredible at doing that and getting a sound.

So, the real secret to playing slow is playing slow.

[Laughs]. Yeah, playing slow. Actually you're just getting ready for something that isn't going to end up being fast. The secret to playing slow is playing slow and just calming down. Try to pretend your nervous system is that of a really relaxed old guy, rather than the nervous people that we are inside.

This album has a very loose feel. Did you rehearse much before the sessions or did you just figure it out in the studio?

We had one rehearsal. I had obsessed about the material for months. Then, when we got this group together, I could really visualize in my ear who was going to be there and I could start to think about the arrangements and how we were going to approach it. All that pre-production can go on, you know, just on your own without ever playing a note. Then we got together and did one long rehearsal and went into the studio the next day and started recording. Although most of us used headphones, we had visual contact and we were all in the same room. It was pretty nice that way, rather than everyone being in separate booths with headphones, which gets antiseptic sometimes.

How set are the arrangements when you go into the studio?

We tweaked it as we went along. I think about mainly tempo, feel, and keys to make sure that every tune is a little bit different than the others. That way, after the recording is done you can sequence it. I also think about who is going to solo first so that it's not always the guitar soloing first. The keyboards could come in with a featured part, or the bass, or even the drums. I was just thinking about variety and I had made a list of how that's going to be ahead of time, I always do that.

You and [keyboardist] Larry Goldings have played together a lot over the years. What did he bring to the session?

He is my favorite. To tell you the truth, as a guitar player, I have a hard time playing with piano players. I think we all do because it sounds too thick to have the doubling of chords going on, but that's why he is one of the great accompanists in music today. He has huge ears and always thinks orchestrally and doesn't just go on automatic pilot and plays all the thick voicings he knows, like some piano players do. His main gig is playing with James Taylor. That's a big thing, to play behind a really great singer like that. It's something else, man.

How did you choose the rhythm section?

I had played with Brian [Blade, drummer] once. I am a huge fan of his and I knew he was great but I didn't know he was as great as he is. Turns out he's a magician. The stuff gets so sensitive when you are doing this real interactive, quiet music. He lives in a creative place and I loved it. I have played with Scott [Colley, bassist] since he first came to New York and I always dug playing with him. They had done a bunch of records together and Brian suggested him. They're a unit. They work well together.

Your solo on "Gee Baby, Ain't I Good To You" is especially bluesy. I imagine B.B. King was quite an influence on you?

I love the blues, man. The thing about that tune is that if you look at the chords it sounds like the same old thing. But it's kind of in two keys. It starts in the key of C, but then all of a sudden it's in the key of E flat. There are a lot of different ways to treat it, but the blues works all the way through it. I love blues. I find myself getting more and more into it. It's like what we were talking about before when you want to phrase like a singer. Pat Metheny once said to me, the stuff that he and I play on the guitar—all those notes and licks—is not really what the guitar does best. He said he thought the guitar did two things

really well, big open-string chords and the blues. Everyone plays the blues, but you need the vibrato. I remember there were certain guys that had a vibrato that just killed me when I was younger.

Yeah, you always hear jazz guitarists try to emulate saxophonists.

Or even blues vocals. It's just the idiom. Saxophone was the primary solo instrument in early rock and roll and R&B. A lot of it does come from the sax. A lot of it also comes from singing. You just sit there with a string and bend the notes and if someone understands blues and can hear it a little bit, they can get some of that happening. You just need one string. It's been much maligned, there have been a lot of sad-ass blues guitar players but the greats like to me Albert King and B.B. King, the inventor of the idiom, Otis Rush, those are the guys I love and continue to just be in awe of them.

For the most part, you have one guitar sound on the album. What guitar did you use?

Well, I played the same old guitar I've always had. I keep buying new guitars but I never actually use them. I play them in my basement. I use this 1981 Ibanez AS200. Basically, it's their copy of a Gibson ES-335. I have played that since they gave it to me in Nagoya, Japan when I was on tour in the early eighties.

Have you modified it at all since then?

Not on purpose. It came with this little switch that takes one of the pickups in and out of phase, and I didn't like it. I just wanted it to be a regular humbucker, so I filed that down. That was a modification, I guess. The input was on the side of the guitar so I had it moved to the front of the guitar. The pickups are still stock, I am scared to change them. There might be much better pickups in the world, but I like these. They are loud as shit.

Recently, you have been using Vox amps. Did you use them for this album?

This time I used a Two-Rock amp. I went out to California and did a thing with Robben Ford. While I was out there, I didn't have my amp and at the rehearsal Robben had his pre-CBS Fender Super Reverb that was modified by Dumble. This amp was one of the greatest amps of all time! I was flipping out over the tone I was getting. Robben said, "Listen, I will hook you up with Dumble and if you can get an old Fender, he can do the same thing for you." It just turned out to be too expensive. I still want to have that done but I am just waiting for my ship to come in. Robben then told me about the Two-Rock amps. I was in Europe and the Two-Rock company was nice enough to let me use one of their amps on a gig and I loved it. On the album, I used a Custom Reverb through a Two-Rock cabinet. Since then, I have gone back and put it through the Vox cab and I think I like that even more. There is something about the sound of that cabinet. I still use Vox AC30 on tour, when I don't bring my own amp.

You didn't use too many effects on the album, but I heard some subtle tremolo on "I Loves You Porgy."

It's a Moollon Tremolo. I was in North Korea playing a gig and the guy showed up. I like it. It has such a cool design.

Is "Johan" a tribute to the composer?

Yes. It is. I wrote the piece and then afterwards, or maybe as I was writing it, I realized that there was a really famous Bach piece that I learned on the guitar 30 years ago. I learned part of it on the guitar, never learned the whole thing. I can't remember the name of it. It's like a Pavanne, or one of the dances. Segovia played it and it's in E. I realized that the beginning of my song is really similar. It's kind of a voicing I played, so I dedicated the piece to the master.

Do you have any classical guitar aspirations?

Maybe in my next life. That might be still the greatest thing you can do with the guitar, but it's almost like a different instrument.

On "Plain Song," I can almost hear elements of Bill Frisell.

Frisell has copied me for years. I'm joking. I love Bill's playing and he really influenced me when we played together in the '80s. When I play that type of stuff, I don't think of Bill. I am actually a fan of the old-school country western stuff. Country sounds are just inherent in the guitar. I also think of singers. There is a way you can articulate [*plays riff*] by pulling off on open strings that really has some of that celtic vibe. George Jones is my favorite and all those guys like Merle Haggard, those real hillbillies.

If you had to pick five ballad performances that have stuck with you over the years, what would they be?

I have to first mention a disclaimer. These were the first five I could think of. It gets too weird if I really think about it. I'm going to only mention instrumentalists, because the *truly* great ballad performances come from singers and there are just too many to list. Immediately, I think of Sarah Vaughan and Frank Sinatra. Every singer, if they are worth their salt, can sing ballads because that is the human experience.

The first one would be "I Loves You Porgy" by Bill Evans from his album, *Live at the Village Vanguard*. It's on my record, so I stole it from him.

John Coltrane's "Naima" is just a beautiful song, period. Coltrane is so outstanding as an improviser and saxophonist that we forget about his compositions.

Jim Hall is the great ballad player of the guitar. His version of "I Should Care," which is on *Where Would I Be* is a solo guitar piece and it's stunning to me.

My own personal thing is playing ballads with Steve Swallow. The way he can play them on the bass has been such an influence on me. He made a record with a big band from Sweden called *Swallow Songs*. It's all Steve's music and it opens with a tune called "Away," and his solo is a great example of how he can play a ballad.

I was thinking of something with a saxophone. Ben Webster is one of the greatest ever. His version of "Like Someone to Watch Over Me" from *See You at The Fair* is amazing.

Keith Jarrett. There's a way to play fast, with a lot of notes, over a ballad and still keep it a ballad and he can do that. The example that always struck me is on this very obscure record from early in Keith's career. It's an album put out by Billy Martin, the drummer from Medeski, Martin and Wood, on his own label. It's an album by the drummer Bob Moses called *Animal Love*. There is a version of "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" and Keith is on that tune and his playing is just incredible. It's a lesson for me about how you can play a lot of notes on a ballad.

I also wanted to mention Bill Frisell because I feel like he is one of the only people of our generation that can really do it and play beautifully. I couldn't think of a specific example, but there's a ton of them.

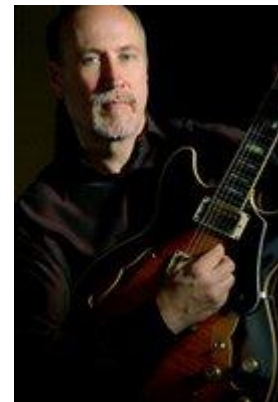
MOVE

A peaceful moment with a jazz icon: John Scofield tells it all

John Scofield chats about his newest album, jazz maturity, passing the torch and what it was like to play with the great Miles Davis.

By [Matthew Flores](#) Published Nov. 4, 2011

John Scofield is a man at peace. After nearly 40 years and enough records to stuff Dizzy Gillespie's cheeks, the man known as "Sco" has released an album that perfectly exemplifies his skills as a guitar player: cool, confident and full of the experience that only comes after decades writing and recording music.



A Moment's Peace is not stereotypical Scofield. Gone are the incendiary leads and frenetic, funky jams he has become known for. This is a set of ballads, ranging from the unique (a relaxed cover of The Beatles' "I Will") to the smooth and groovy ("You Don't Know What Love Is") to the laid-back and delicate ("Already September," a standout Scofield composition).

Scofield talked with MOVE about his newest release, his newfound jazz maturity and what it was like to play with the great Miles Davis.

[MOVE] *A Moment's Peace*, as the title suggests, is much more tranquil than many of your other albums. What prompted the shift in tone and mood on this album?

[John Scofield] I kind of shift tone and mood somewhat for all of my albums. The temptation when you're a jazz musician is to just make the same record over and over again because you like jazz and you want to get it right. I like to have all of them actually be a little bit different, in order to get some variety. I feel like I'm actually able to play ballads now. I've always been a fan of jazz performances of ballads and slow material, but I feel like I'm good at it now. It took me a while to reach a certain maturity.

[MOVE]Where did you find a lot of inspiration for this album?

[JS] I think it's really the greats of music that inspire me, on this album and for all things. I do get a lot of inspiration from the greats of jazz, really and their ballad performances. Miles (Davis), (John) Coltrane ... Ben Webster was a great ballads player and Bill Evans on the piano, to name a few.

[MOVE]Who would you consider some of your biggest influences musically throughout your career?

[JS]I would say the biggest influences have been the guys I've played with who were better than me. That goes kind of across the board from when I first started out. One of the big influences was Miles Davis. I could get to play in his band and really learn from him but he had been my favorite before that from his records. One thing is that I'm going to be 60 this month, and I have gotten to check out a lot of jazz. I'm a student of it just like everyone is. It's been a long time but I've learned a little bit from this guy and a little bit from that guy and it doesn't stop. All the greats, all the big names that everyone knows about, I've really listened to. They're great for a reason.

[MOVE]You mentioned you've played with Miles, you've played with Chet Baker, Charles Mingus. What was it like playing with those real giants of jazz?

[JS] I got nervous, but it was an ecstatic experience getting to play with the guys who I had grown up listening to their records. Joe Henderson was another guy like that – Herbie Hancock, Gary Burton. I feel like I've really been lucky that I've gotten to play with my idols and that may be the greatest thing about playing music is getting to play with these legends. I'm a jazz fan first. I think all of us are. You have to love the music more than anything.

[MOVE]Did playing with those guys shape the way you play and compose music?

[JS] Not only those guys, but all of the musicians in my career who were a step ahead of me, the older players. That's how we learn. We pass down the experience from one person to another.

[MOVE]So, where's that experience being passed today?

[JS] Well, it's being passed to the younger musicians that get a chance to play with people who know what they're doing. I think it's always been like that. I think music is history in a way. It's like living history. When you can talk to a musician who can talk to you about music and play for you and show you how they approach improvising and jazz and composition, tell you what they like, you're learning a little piece of history.

[MOVE]You have this tour in support of your new album. You've had a few records in the past few years – what's the next step in your career?

[JS] I hope to just keep making records and keep performing. It looks like I'm gonna get my wish. I'd like to get better. I'd like to write some good songs. I'd like to write some stuff that really works and keep working on it. Write some new tunes and maybe even get better on the guitar. You never know.