

Gone, Not Forgotten

Guitarist Sheryl Bailey crafts a heady tribute to late six-string titan Emily Remler

As an aspiring guitar player growing up in Pittsburgh, Sheryl Bailey drew inspiration during her high school years from Emily Remler, the accomplished Wes Montgomery-inspired burner and Concord recording artist. “I remember recording some stuff off the radio of her playing a live concert and I transcribed some of the tunes,” she says. “Later, I got to see her play a couple of times when she came to Pittsburgh. Then when I was 18 or 19 years old, while I was going to the Berklee College of Music, Emily was living in Pittsburgh and I took a lesson with her. She was a role model for me, although I think about it more now than I did then. I never wanted to make an issue of separating myself as a woman guitarist or artist, but in retrospect I really see how she opened a lot of doors for women in jazz.”

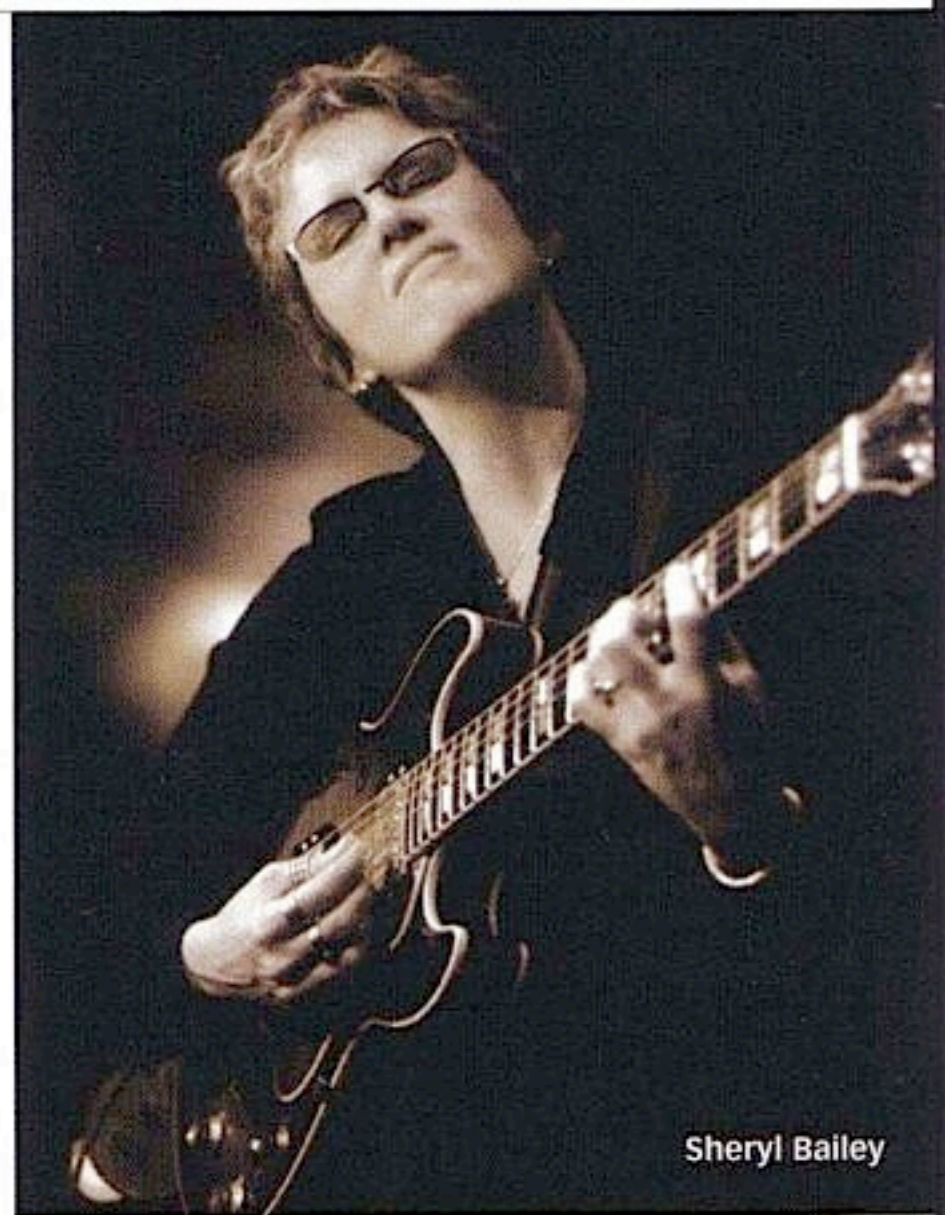
An accomplished player in her own right and a New York resident since 1995 (the year she placed third in the Thelonious Monk competition), Bailey pays tribute to the late Remler on *A New Promise*, a potent big-band outing for the Manchester Craftsmen Guild’s MCG Jazz label. Backed by the 18-piece Three Rivers Jazz Orchestra, led by saxophonist-arranger Mike Tomaro, Bailey tackles three Remler compositions: “Mocha Spice” from 1984’s *Catwalk*, “Carenia” from 1990’s *This Is Me* and the title track to 1988’s *East to Wes*. Along with two standards, “You and the Night” and J.J. Johnson’s haunting “Lament,” Bailey contributes three originals, including the title track, a moving ballad she wrote with Remler in mind. She says, “I wrote ‘A New Promise’ in memory of when I would see Emily play when I was in high school. I would just promise myself I would practice very hard and try to one day be a great guitarist like she was.”

Producer Marty Ashby, a jazz guitarist himself, as well as executive producer of the Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild since its inception, came to be close friends with Remler when she lived in Pittsburgh during the late ’80s. “Emily was like family,” he says. “She and my dad used to jam for hours and we became close friends. In fact, the first time I walked into the Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild with Emily, she got a call from MCG founder Bill Strickland to come over and get a tour of the new facility that he had just built to promote jazz in Pittsburgh, and she asked me to come along with her. I was working in the marketing department at the Pittsburgh Symphony at the time, but after we toured that place I went home and wrote a proposal for Bill Strickland as to why he should hire me. And 22 years later I’m still here.”

Ashby explains that the idea for the Remler tribute project came about three years ago. “I was in New York attending a Doris Duke Foundation meeting and that evening I was having dinner in the Village with one of the members. We walked past the 55 Bar, where Sheryl was playing, and I thought, I’ve heard of her. I think she’s from Pittsburgh. So we went in and, man, she blew me away! It was a déjà vu experience but at the same time it was like Emily-plus. I heard so much of Em in her lines, but then she had some other stuff that was different than what Emily ever had. I introduced myself afterwards and started talking to her about doing a project together.”

A New Promise stands as a fitting tribute to the guitarist, who died on May 4, 1990 at age 32. Says Ashby, “This record with Sheryl is about keeping Emily’s spirit alive and reminding people how much she contributed in such a short period of time to the collective of jazz music as we know it.”

Aside from her ongoing guitar teaching duties in Manhattan at the Collective (formerly the Drummers Collective), Bailey holds down gigs in three wildly disparate bands. With clarinet



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virtuoso David Krakauer and his Klezmer Madness! band, she delves into an audacious hybrid of old-world Jewish melodies, free-jazz, funk and hip-hop (as heard on 2004’s *Live in Krakow* and 2005’s *Bubbemeises: Lies My Gramma Told Me*, both on Label Bleu); with the dynamic Jazz Guitars Play Jimi Hendrix quartet, she goes toe-to-toe with fellow guitarist Vic Juris in the company of organist Brian Charette and drummer Anthony Pinciotti on swinging renditions of Hendrix staples like “Castles Made of Sand,” “Manic Depression,” “The Wind Cries Mary” and “Third Stone From the Sun.”

The busy guitarist also continues to showcase her warm tone and fluid postbop chops in her Sheryl Bailey 3, a modernist take on the organ trio featuring Gary Versace on Hammond B3 and Ian Froman on drums. They have three CDs to their credit—2003’s *Power of 3!*, 2004’s *Bull’s Eye* and 2006’s *Live @ the Fat Cat*, all on the PureMusic label—and recently filmed a concert DVD for Mel Bay (with Charette subbing for Versace) before a live audience at Nola Studios. **BILL MILKOWSKI**