

RON ESCHETE TRIO HISTORY

Ron Escheté (*pronounced ESH-tay*), the consummate master of the seven-string guitar, joins 6-string bass pioneer Todd Johnson to lay the formidable foundation of the Ron Escheté Trio. With the addition of such fine drummers as Kendall Kay, Joe LaBarbera or Paul Humphrey, this trio renders mainstream jazz with a refreshing new texture.

While Escheté has long been regarded as one of the finest guitarists in mainstream jazz, he now ranks as an innovative leader for his work with this ensemble. "The Escheté trio is as polished as the classic Modern Jazz Quartet... This is a unit that speaks with a single voice. It is a voice of brilliant musical reason." – Jim Merod, *Jazz News*. What is most unique about the sound of this trio is the depth and texture created by the coupling of Escheté's seven strings with Johnson's six strings. The outcome is "a rich tapestry of melody, harmony and teamwork," says Hal Howland for *Modern Drummer Magazine*.

Band leader Ron Escheté was born in 1948 in Houma, Louisiana, and not surprisingly his early influences were jazz masters Jim Hall, Howard Roberts and Wes Montgomery. Escheté began playing guitar at the age of 14, joined a quartet and was working clubs in Louisiana before he had even graduated from high school. He attended Loyola University and studied classical guitar with Paul Guma. Before he had completed college Escheté was tapped to tour with Buddy Greco and he quickly established his reputation as a premier accompanist. Over the decades Escheté has worked with the greatest artists in jazz including: Ella Fitzgerald; Sarah Vaughn; Diana Krall; Dizzy Gillespie; Milt Jackson; Ray Brown and many more.

Escheté cites a 1988 gig in San Diego as a critical turning point in his career. There he began to shed his reputation as the quintessential sideman; he stepped to the center of the stage and he began exploring original material. "Long considered to be one of the finest guitarists in mainstream jazz by musicians and listeners alike, he has now taken over the reins, and 'innovative leader' might be a better appellation," says preeminent jazz critic, Zan Stewart.

In 1990 Escheté teamed with a bright and daring young bass player named Todd Johnson. Johnson is now recognized as a pioneer of the six-string bass. With his custom Yamaha six-string bass, equipped with a midi pick-up, Johnson uses an innovative technique where he plays chord changes and bass lines simultaneously. Additionally, his use of the midi interface, a technology which allow his instrument to sound like many instruments at the same time, adds both harmonic color and texture that further defines his unique sound. His instrument can, quite literally, sound like an organ and a bass at the same time. As a seasoned performing artist, Todd Johnson has developed a rich philosophy encompassing his spiritual, educational and achievement-oriented sides. Johnson sees his talent as a gift to continually enhance and develop.

As an integral member of this critically acclaimed jazz trio, Johnson excels as both a supporting musician and a seasoned soloist. He is consistently cited for his contributions of skill, originality, and versatility, as well as his ability to sound as if he is simultaneously playing multiple instruments. Group leader Ron Escheté says "Todd... can sound like a second guitar player or even an organ or electric piano." Zan Stewart of the *Los Angeles Times* writes that Johnson's six-string bass along with Escheté's seven-string guitar "give the musicians an amazing range of sounds and approaches." *20th Century Guitar Magazine's* Jim Fisch calls it "a delight to witness the telepathic communication between Todd and Ron seamlessly dovetailing their carefully crafted improvisation." The group is repeatedly hailed as the trio that sounds like a quartet.

The Ron Escheté Trio has recorded 5 CDs: *Softwinds*, *Rain Or Shine*, *Mo' Strings Attached*, *Live At Rocco* and *In The Middle*, the latter featuring the current line-up of Ron Escheté, Todd Johnson and Kendall Kay. The group, which performs regularly in the Southern California area, has also toured extensively in the United States.

In addition to touring and recording, both Escheté and Johnson teach music at colleges, major universities and special clinics including: California Institute of the Arts; the California State Universities at Fullerton and Long Beach; Loyola University; Golden West College; Louisiana State University at New Orleans; Musicians' Institute; North Texas State University; Spokane Falls Community College; Utah State University; and more.

Jim Merod, *Jazz News* says that with this group "the dedicated listener finds genuine jazz – melodic beauty joined to harmonic perfection."