



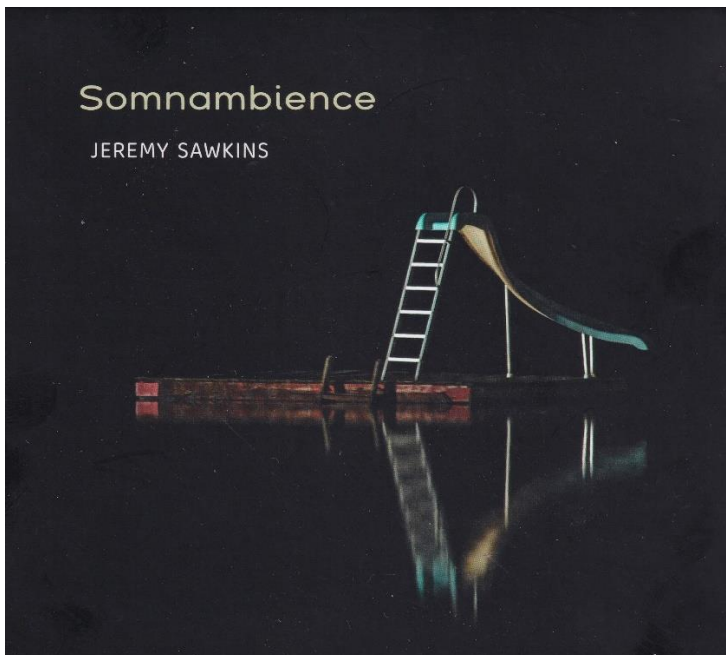
SOMN AMBIENCE

Album review by Eric Myers

Label: Organized Discs

Personnel: Jeremy Sawkins (solo acoustic guitar)

[This review appeared in the magazine of the Australian Jazz Museum AJAZZ 94, August, 2022]



I've heard the left-handed guitarist Jeremy Sawkins several times playing live - on electric guitar, I hasten to add - most memorably with two outstanding bands: pianist/singer Sharny Russell's at Sydney's 505 venue in March, 2017 and later with Miroslav Bukovsky's Wanderlust in Foundry 616 in July, 2018.

A musician of expertise and virtuosity Sawkins is comfortably at home in the company of Australia's leading jazz musicians, where he effortlessly shines. On this album, entitled *Somnambience* - a term he's coined, but which he says literally means "sleep ambience" - he's created an unusual context for himself, playing unaccompanied the nylon string acoustic guitar. It's a quiet album of eight tracks only, running to about half-an-hour of music, but it's not without depth, and not without variety.



Jeremy Sawkins (far left): comfortable in the company of some of Australia's leading jazz musicians, in this case the band led by Sharny Russell, L-R, Sally Cameron (vocals), Paul Cutlan (reeds), Russell (piano/vocals), Brendan Clarke (bass), Gordon Rytmeister (drums)... PHOTO CREDIT DAVID MACCULLAGH

Sawkins describes this album as a tribute to some of the composers of music in the Great American Songbook. It's much more however than simply a routine reading of well-known standards. Certainly three of them are there - *Angel Eyes*, *Polkadots and Moonbeams*, and *My One and Only Love* - but Sawkins also takes on two highly melodic popular hits, Henry Mancini's *Moon River* and Richard Rodgers' *The Sound of Music*. While these could be regarded as merely a nod towards popular taste, Sawkins explains in the liner notes the personal significance of these choices: *Moon River* was a favourite of his mother Ann, and *The Sound of Music* a favourite of his younger brother Adam, who died suddenly when Sawkins and his daughter were returning from Italy where the idea of this solo album was hatched some years ago with his friend, the recording engineer Daniele Di Giovanni, who lives in Tuscany. The sudden death of Adam, writes Sawkins, "left me feeling a deep sadness which lasted for quite some time".

These two well-known melodies, which one rarely hears in a jazz repertoire, are balanced by three decidedly more unusual pieces: two Sawkins originals, entitled *Drift* and *Dom's Norfolk*, and Coltrane's somewhat difficult composition, the famous

Naima. Sawkins' versions of these tunes are exceedingly careful; he's in no hurry. It's as if he's playing for his own enjoyment, savouring the harmonic changes in what are lovely tunes, indeed glorifying in them, a man in love with the guitar. The fact that most of the tunes are out of tempo - *rubato* I think is the correct musical term for this approach - underlines the unhurried nature of the album, so that Sawkins sounds like a man in a state of relaxation, but at the same time deep in thought, recollecting in tranquillity.



*The left-handed guitarist Jeremy Sawkins: an album epitomizing modesty...
PHOTO CREDIT
JOE GLAYSHER*

This album was recorded in Tuscany, Italy, in 2019, and engineered by Daniele Di Giovanni. It epitomizes modesty. Sometimes Sawkins' treatment of melody is not literal; he takes a free approach, and creates music which occasionally is pleasingly abstract in his choice of chords, but the changes are unmistakably there, even if sometimes they are below the surface, leavened with only a minimum of improvisation. Unusually, for an album by a jazz guitarist, *Somnambience* is not a showcase for technical brilliance. Sawkins is playing here finger-style, rather than using a plectrum, and is going for a warm, round sound, to express his liking for melody and harmony.

Other articles on this site which may be of interest:

Eric Myers, "Sharny Russell at the 505", March 20, 2017, at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/new-postings>

Eric Myers, "Wanderlust: Groove is in These Veterans' Hearts", *The Australian*, July 31, 2018, at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/theaustralian-2015-7>