



Bio information: **MICHAEL GIBBS AND THE NDR BIGBAND**

Title: **PLAY A BILL FRISSELL SET LIST** (Cuneiform Rune 400) Format: CD / DIGITAL

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ / BIG BAND / GUITAR

**Four Decades Into A Potent Creative Partnership,
Legendary Arranger/Composer Michael Gibbs Crafts *Play a Bill Frisell Set List*,
An Unprecedented Program of Revelatory Orchestral Pieces For
Guitar Great Bill Frisell and the Powerhouse NDR Bigband with Drummer Jeff Ballard**

As a dauntingly prolific artist **Bill Frisell** has recorded in a vast array of settings, but he's never made an album like *Play a Bill Frisell Set List*. Captured live in concert with the superb **NDR Bigband**, the guitarist delivers a tour de force performance on a program of ingenious arrangements designed specifically for him and the NDR by **Michael Gibbs**. In a welcome burst of activity by Gibbs, a criminally under-documented master, Cuneiform is releasing *Set List* alongside another Gibbs collaboration with the NDR Bigband, *In My View*. Both albums will be available on **June 9, 2015**.

Recorded at the **Überjazz Festival** with NDR Bigband on Oct 26, 2013, *Set List* captures Frisell interacting with one of the world's great jazz orchestras, exploring sleek, spacious, vividly expressive arrangements of compositions drawn from throughout his career. Gibbs didn't plan the concert as a recording session, but after many years of trying to bring Frisell and the NDR together he felt the results were too good to keep under wraps. "**Jeff Ballard** playing drums for this concert was a dream, and the band really enjoyed playing it, so the music was magical," Gibbs says. "I couldn't resist the opportunity to release it."

The album opens with a gorgeous version of Frisell's "**Throughout**," a sumptuous, roiling ballad that weaves his chiming guitar together with **Christof Lauer**'s emphatic tenor sax. Introduced as a solo piece on his 1983 **ECM** debut as a leader, *In Line*, "**Throughout**" offers a fascinating case study of the protean quality of many Frisell compositions. Until now the most memorable version was by the extraordinary trio with **Kermit Driscoll** and **Joey Baron** on 1991's *Live*.

Gibbs' singular insight into Frisell's expansive musical personality inspires the project's arresting array of moods and textures. He draws out the guitarist's rockin' swagger on **Gil Evans**' "Las Vegas Tango" with an adaption of Evans' arrangement that sounds like it sauntered off of *Sketches of Spain* (from a Buenos Aires rock club?) as Frisell's shimmering guitar lines cut through the surging brass. He sends the guitarist spelunking for unexpected notes on the **Lee Konitz** standard "**Subconscious-Lee**," a tune that Frisell has spent years exploring and dissecting.

On a stunning medley crafted out of two pieces from Frisell's 2013 string oriented album *Big Sur*, Gibbs combines the tautly cinematic "**On the Lookout**" (a theme in search of a Japanese caper film) to the ethereally ascending "**Far Away**." Another highlight is Gibbs' ecstatically swirling take on "**You've Got To Hide Your Love Away**," a song that Frisell covered on his 2011 tribute album to **John Lennon**, *All We Are Saying*. The intimate and impromptu **Frisell/Ballard** duet on **Monk**'s "**Misterioso**" provides a few deep breaths of space (it's the only tune that's also featured on Gibbs' *In My View*, where it gets a wondrously woozy reading).

A boogying trot through **Benny Goodman**'s "**Benny's Bugle**," a song that Frisell recorded in 2010 with his **Beautiful Dreamers** trio, offers jazz fans that supreme pleasure of hearing him tip his hat to pioneering legend **Charlie Christian**. The album closes with a brief, bravura feature for Ballard on "**Freddy's Step**" from Frisell's "**Some Song and Dance**" suite. It's a brassy, flashy blast of joy, with Frisell's guitar peaking through the stuttering horns.

No one album could come close to encompassing Frisell's vast output, and Gibbs didn't intend to create a comprehensive Frisell overview for their 2013 concert with Bigband in **Hamburg, Germany**, despite being familiar with the younger man's work. Frisell's teacher since Berklee, mentor, and life-long friend, Gibbs had known the guitarist since his career began. While Gibbs tried to enlist Frisell in coming up with a *Set List* program for 2013's **Überjazz Festival**, the guitarist's famous reticence meant that Gibbs was largely left to his own devices. "He never tells me too much," Gibbs says. "I ask what do you want to do, and he ums and ahs. Bill writes about an album a day, so there's tons of music of his that I haven't heard. When we did the concert, *Big Sur* had just come out so I arranged two pieces from there. The others we had done a few years before in a concert with the **BBC Symphony Orchestra** at the **London Jazz Festival**. '**Las Vegas Tango**' was my only choice outside of his repertoire. Bill knew the piece. It's got an enticing harmonic twist, something that **Gil Evans** invented, which intrigued Bill so much."

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It's difficult to overstate Gibbs' impact on the trajectory of Frisell's music and career. As a Denver teenager recently turned on to **Wes Montgomery**, Frisell convinced his father to take him to a touring **Newport Jazz Festival** show at **Red Rocks** in the summer of 1968. Unfortunately, Montgomery died a few weeks before the show, but they went anyway, and the experience radically opened his ears.

"It was an amazing program, with **Cannonball, Monk, Dionne Warwick**, and **Gary Burton** with **Bob Moses, Coryell**, and **Steve Swallow**, and they blew my brains out," Frisell recalls. "I'd never heard anything like it. So I started getting those records, and there's some guy named **Mike Gibbs** who wrote half the songs on these records. He had so much to do with that sound, making a world for that group to inhabit."

Frisell started following Gibbs' music, and was thrilled to discover that he was composer-in-residence at **Berklee** when he enrolled in 1975. He took all of the classes that Gibbs offered and was tremendously encouraged when Gibbs complimented his playing after catching Frisell's group at a gig (Gibbs still makes a point of getting out to hear young musicians). Determined to work more closely with Gibbs, Frisell called him one day and offered his services for his student band.

"It's one of the most aggressive things I've ever done," Frisell says. "It was a big deal for me to do that. I've never really actively pursued anything in music. Things fall in front of me. But I thought I can't *not* do this. He already had a guitar player, but he immediately said, 'great, come on board.'"

By 1978 Frisell had relocated to Belgium to focus on his music, which meant he was well placed to step in when Gibbs needed a guitarist for a tour of the UK for which **Phillip Catherine** was unavailable. The group featured **Kenny Wheeler, Charlie Mariano**, and the German bassist **Eberhard Weber**, with whom Frisell would play a duo at every concert. The connection he forged with the bassist on this tour led to Frisell's participation on Weber's 1979 album *Fluid Rustle*, the first of the dozens of recordings that Frisell would do on **ECM** as a sideman and leader.

"So much came from my association with Mike," Frisell says. "Then when I moved to New York he was there and hired me for a gig with **Bob Moses** and **Steve Swallow**. I was just thrown in with all these guys who have been so important to me. He went from being my hero to a friend, and he's always been my teacher. We just kept doing things over the years. We worked on **Marianne Faithfull's** album *Strange Weather*, and did a couple of other tours here and there. I've always fantasized about doing something with him adapting some of my music."

Set List isn't exactly Frisell's first big band project. He played on the **Mike Gibbs Orchestra's** acclaimed 1989 album *Big Music* (**Venture/Virgin**), and drummer **Bob Moses'** classic 1982 **Gramavision** session *When Elephants Dream of Music*. He's also featured on several tracks on *Atmospheric Conditions Permitting*, the ECM anthology documenting **Albert Mangelsdorff's Jazzensemble des Hessischen Rundfunks**. But Frisell has never been the featured soloist on a big band session, and with Gibbs' melodically verdant, harmonically suggestive arrangements, he's not likely to find a better set list than *Set List*.

Michael Gibbs bio:

Born on September 25th, 1937 in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (now Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe), Michael Gibbs grew up playing trombone and piano. He moved to Boston in 1959 to study at Berklee College of Music, and quickly fell in with progressive-minded jazz innovators. In the summer of 1960 a full scholarship brought him to Lenox School of Jazz for studies with **Gunther Schuller, George Russell** and **J.J. Johnson**. Deeply drawn to contemporary classical music, he graduated from the Boston Conservatory of Music in 1963 and earned a full scholarship at Tanglewood Summer School, where he absorbed information from Schuller, **Aaron Copland, Iannis Xenakis**, and **Lukas Foss**.

Gibbs made his recording debut in 1962 with Berklee buddy **Gary Burton**, contributing to the vibraphonist's second album with **Phil Woods, Clark Terry, Tommy Flanagan** and **Joe Morello**. But by 1964 Gibbs had relocated to London, where he became a first-call trombonist through his work with **Tubby Hayes, Graham Collier, John Dankworth** and **Cleo Laine**. It was also the start of his prolific career as a studio player and arranger on radio, television, film and pop sessions.

Recognized as one of jazz's leading young arrangers and composers, Gibbs developed a personal, thickly textured approach inspired by **Gil Evans, Charles Ives** and **Olivier Messiaen**. Incorporating driving rock rhythms and asymmetrical phrasing, his work anticipated the jazz-rock fusion movement of the 1970's. The release of his self-named debut album in 1970 and a follow up *Tanglewood '63* (both on **Deram**), seminal sessions featuring free blowing horns, blazing electric guitars and propulsive funk beats, led to a succession of **Melody Maker Awards**, including **First Composer, Best Big Band, Musician of the Year**, and **First Arranger**.

At the height of his European success, Gibbs returned to the US in 1974 to take up the post of **Composer-In-Residence** at **Berklee**, a position he held until 1983, when he decided to focus on freelancing in New York City. After two years he returned to London, and by 1988 he was recording with his own bands again, including his critically acclaimed 1988 album *Big Music* (**Virgin/Venture**). Commuting between the US and Europe since the mid-80s, Gibbs has poured most of his creative energy into writing, but he's still managed to hit the road on occasion, like a 1991 UK tour with **John Scofield**. He received a welcome burst of attention in 2007 when he took an all-star large ensemble on the road in the UK as part of the celebration of his 70th birthday, a group featuring **Frisell, Steve Swallow, Adam Nussbaum** and **Chris Hunter**.

Now based in Malaga, Spain, Gibbs is a dedicated educator who has taught at major universities around the world. He's composed scores for nearly a dozen films, from **Bette Davis's** *Madame Sin* and **Robin Williams' Being Human** to **John Woo's** *Hard Boiled*.

and **Bill Forsyth's *Housekeeping***. As a composer, he's probably best known for "**Sweet Rain,**" a jazz standard that has been recorded by numerous jazz giants, including **Stan Getz, Stephane Grappelli, Gary Burton, Randy Weston, and Herb Pomeroy.**

He's been associated with the NDR even longer than with Frisell. Since his first collaboration with the orchestra in 1973, he's collaborated with the band on several projects, including a gorgeous 2011 album with the NDR featuring vocalist **Norma Winstone**, called ***Here's A Song For You***. His first project for Cuneiform was 2012's ***Back in the Days***, a sumptuous anthology that gathered together highlights of sessions that Gibbs recorded with the NDR between 1995-2003.

Established in 1945 as a German regional radio dance band, the Hamburg-based **Nord Deutscher Rundfunk Big Band** (aka **NDR Bigband**) is one the world's longest-running jazz repertory ensembles. It adopted its present, supremely hip identity in 1971 when **Wolfgang Kunert** took over as producer. Over the past four decades the NDR has collaborated with some of jazz's most eloquent improvisers, including American masters **Chet Baker, Johnny Griffin, Howard Johnson, Herb Geller and Joe Pass**, and European stars **Barbara Dennerlein, Tomasz Stanko, Phillip Catherine, and John Surman.**

For more information on Michael Gibbs and the NDR Bigband, please visit:

<http://www.cuneiformrecords.com/bandshtml/gibbs.html>

For additional Michael Gibbs bio info, discography etc, please visit:

<http://gibbs.onttonen.info/>

For additional Bill Frisell bio info, discography etc, please visit:

<http://www.billfrisell.com/>

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available for download on the ***Michael Gibbs and the NDR Bigband*** artist page @ www.cuneiformrecords.com



WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT

MICHAEL GIBBS & THE NDR BIGBAND

BACK IN THE DAYS

CUNEIFORM (2012)

"Recorded with the NDR Big Band between 1995 and 2003, *Back In The Day*, provides a broad look at Michael Gibbs' songbook and arranging talent. Three pieces...feature Gary Burton...the superb German tenor saxophonist Christof Lauer...gets three feature spots. **4 out of 4 stars.**"

- James Hale, *Downbeat*, June 2012

"The music of Michael Gibbs remains woefully under-recorded, even as the composer hits his mid-70s, so this release from the ever wonderful Cuneiform Records is a bit of an event. ...Inspired by Olivier Messiaen as much as Gil Evans, his music was luxurious, complex but accessible, and driven by rock rhythms and electric instruments....

...These recordings come from three sessions with the German NDR Big Band made from 1995 to 2003. The earliest session features vibraphonist Gary Burton as guest soloist (Gibbs' first arranging job was for Burton in the early 60s...while all sessions feature the massively underrated saxophonist Christof Lauer, whose work is a joy throughout.

The highlight here is *Mosher*... a sumptuous ballad for Burton's luminous vibes and Lauer's airy tenor. In fact it's the more introspective material that stands up best – *Tennis, Anyone?* could be a lost Ellington tune re-imagined by Gil Evans, while the brooding *Antique* (from 1975) features some beautifully poised, intricate writing.

...this is an immensely enjoyable set from an under-represented talent."

- Peter Marsh, *BBC Music*, 2012

"...There are other Gibbs originals... And then there are the lovely arrangements of favourite songs by others...

All the usual Gibbs traits are here, including, naturally, his wonderful writing for the low brass – a case of the trombonist doing his fellows some favors. What is really striking once more is how careful he is with the time he is allowed...There is no froth anywhere, no self-indulgence. It's all vital stuff with no filler. A very valuable addition to any (no matter how meager) Mike Gibbs collection."

- Peter Bacon, *thejazzbreakfast*, June 2, 2012

"...*Back In The Days*...continues the tradition that the Cuneiform label has already established, via recent releases by John Surman and Soft Machine, of releasing top-notch material recorded for German radio by distinguished British jazz artists....Very high quality stuff, and it's thrilling to see Cuneiform actively releasing it. More, please."

-Dave DiMartino, *Yahoo Music*, January 24, 2012

“...a lush, richly eclectic, sometimes lurid collection of tracks recorded both live and in the studio at several sessions in 1995, 2002, and 2003....the compositions here reflect his work as a film composer more than his fusion days in the early 70s....Gibbs’ long career...encompasses a vast range of styles...

The album’s highlight us Jail Blues, a noir masterpiece, like a slow, symphonically arranged Bryan Beninghove number...Round Midnight takes its cue from the Evans arrangement but is more cinematic, less nebulous: if Miles’ big band recording was the definitive analog version, this is the digital one. ...Gibbs’ old pal Burton is featured on three tracks here, including...his old favorite Country Roads.”
-delarue, *Lucid Culture*, February 4, 2013

“...this album sees composer/arranger Michael Gibbs conducting one of Europe’s most versatile and accomplished large ensembles, the NDR Bigband, through seven of his own tunes, three jazz standards and two pieces by Gibbs collaborators.

The Gibbs originals range from a live opener dedicated to Herb Pomeroy, ‘The Time Has Come’, through a gorgeous feature for alto saxophonist Fiete Felsch ‘With All Due Respect’...to ‘Mosher’, a tribute to Boston saxophonist/educator Jimmy Mosher, one of three selections featuring vibraphonist supreme Gary Burton.

All twelve tracks, though, whether originals or arresting arrangements of standards and classics...are packed with what one recent review termed ‘intriguing inner detail’ and another ‘the tactile sumptuousness of Gibbs’ sound’. ...the entire album, at once vigorous and lush, is a compelling showcase for one of the most original voices in contemporary jazz.”

- Chris Parker, *London Jazz News*, May 15, 2012

“...three tracks from 1995 feature Gary Burton on vibes...**With a sixteen piece ensemble at his disposal for these tunes, Gibbs’ arranging provides a harmonic backdrop that gives Burton the freedom to express his musical ideas.** All three compositions offer different interpretive challenges with the first tune dancing brightly, then a moving ballad that also has some fine tenor work from Christof Lauer, and finally a funky blues on which Burton shines.

While Gibbs’ band voicings may not have the ethereal quality of a Gil Evans, nevertheless he has put together some arrangements that have complex structures and certainly the NDR Bigband is up to the challenge in their execution...

The NDR Bigband is a top flight band and Mike Gibbs has written and arranged charts that are constantly audacious. This disc would be a worthwhile addition to anyone’s record collection. 4 stars.” -Pierre Giroux, *Audiophile Audition*, June 14, 2015

“With one of the finest jazz arrangers in the world and one of the best contemporary big bands around, it’s no wonder that this is such **a remarkably successful album...** ...Mike’s rich, brooding and distinctive voicings provide the perfect setting to draw out and frame **a host of stunning solos by Fiete Felsch, Christof Lauer and Ingolf Burkhardt among others...**”

-Peter Bevan, *Northern Echo Newspaper*, May 2012

“...few artists have...made their names solely as composers and arrangers...when it comes to legacy artists, the name Gil Evans is the one...But there are others who’ve been shaping music for large ensembles in ways that are no less definitive and just as personal.

Michael Gibbs is one such figure...Back in the Days serves as a welcome reminder that the nearly 75 year-old Gibbs is still with us, and still making terrific music...it’s also a chance to recall why artists like vibraphonist Gary Burton, saxophonist Stan Getz and singer Norma have chosen to work with the composer/arranger over the half-century span of his career.

...Gibbs has garnered respect rare amongst such an international bevy of players—in addition to Burton, also including bassist Steve Swallow, guitarists John Scofield, Bill Frisell and Philip Catherine, saxophonist Charlie Mariano and Bob Mintzer, and trumpeters Kenny Wheeler and Ian Carr.... ...with Burton in tow for three tracks...there’s at least some star power to attract those who need it, though every soloist from the...Germany’s NDR Bigband represented here is world class and worthy of attention.... **Burton’s performances on "Country Roads" and, in particular, Gibbs’ bright opener, "The Time Has Come," raise plenty of questions about who exactly defined the vibraphonist’s late 1960s to mid-’70s recordings.** The ultimate answer is...the confluence of a number of factors, [including]...**Gibbs’ role as both an arranger and composer, with Burton drawing from the his gradually expanding songbook as early as Duster (RCA, 1967) and...ECM dates like Ring (1974) and Picture This (1982).** Here, in this 1995 session with guitarist Stephan Diez soloing at length after the ever-impeccable Burton...the harmonic landscape over which Diez solos irrefutably defined by Gibbs’ unmistakable voice.” - John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, March 15, 2012

“This collection...is both a career retrospective and proof that his finesse in mixing orchestral colors is still intact.

...intriguing arrangements are linked to high-gloss solos from band members and especially visiting American vibist Gary Burton.

Nonetheless, precisely because of his musical gifts...there are certain facile qualities in his orchestrations which are multiplied by the performance of the NDR... Carefully harmonized passages and glitteringly contrasted tone colors abound in the arrangements... ..”June The 15th 1967”, composed for Burton...the foot-tapping groove is genuine and was unique for its time.

Composed in 1996, lead-off track “The Time Has Come” is intense and inspiring, with the section work multiplying and swelling as it modulates around Burton’s supple mallet popping solo...Familiar and innovative simultaneously, Steve Swallow’s and Burton’s 1960s standard “Country Roads” is performed at a homey lope....**Burton, of course, is centre of attention, and his aluminium bars chime and ring...** Valuable as a record of what the too-little-recorded Gibbs was up to in the 1990s and early part of this century...it’s evident that a future rendezvous with Burton playing some new Gibbs music would be a welcome addition to the recorded legacy of both Gibbs and the 68-year-old Burton.”

- Ken Waxman, *Jazz Word*, June 25, 2012