

# Guest Stars: Evening Sky plans a release show for their first album

The Providence based group **Evening Sky** is a quartet of jazz musicians — **Chris Brooks** on pedal steel guitar, **Joe Potenza** on bass, **Gino Rosati** on guitars, and **Eric Hastings** on drums — who have a sound not usually found around town. Though partly due to their instrumentation, it's mostly because of the individual talents and their combined taste for a wide range of music. On March 21 at The Parlour, they will be celebrating the release of their first album *Guest Stars*, which features a wide range of covers performed with featured guest vocalists. To get ready for the release, I spoke with Joe Potenza about the group.

**Ben Shaw (Motif):** Who are the musicians in Evening Sky and how long have you been playing as a group?

**Joe Potenza:** The band's been together about a year and a half. Guitarist Gino Rosati and I have played a bazillion gigs together over the last 10 years. When Gino emailed me, going on excitedly about a get together with a pedal steel guitarist, I could tell something was up. I'd met Chris Brooks when he brought his steel guitar to a jazz jam and whipped through some standards and blues. The idea of Gino and Chris together got my imagination churning. When I thought about drummers who could make all of this work, Eric Hastings was the first guy I thought of. Versatility, big ears, not wedded to one style. He was the guy and he responded with interest. So we met and all asked: "Whaddya wanna play??"

**BS:** How would you define your sound?

**JP:** After a couple of rehearsals we started to get a good sense of what material would work. Then as we started thinking of presenting it to people, we grappled with things like a band name and a description that's clear but not limiting. At first, the phrase "jazz on the prairie" came to mind, then I sobered up. We've been using "Roots-Infused Jazz Music / Jazz-Infused Roots Music," or variations on that.

**BS:** How do you all blend the worlds of jazz and roots music together? Are there certain artists you try to imitate?

**JP:** Inspirations include Bill Frisell; Pat Metheny; Keith Jarrett's European Quartet; Willie Nelson; swinging country artists like Bob Wills, Ernest Tubb & Patsy Cline; the Beatles; the blues; New Orleans funk; Thelonious Monk and the Ventures. I'm also a big fan of the group Oregon, the Police, bassist

Charlie Haden and guitarist Duke Levine. Gino, Eric, Chris and I throw all this stuff into a blender and then we see what we can do with it.

**BS:** For this upcoming release, you had several guest singers sit in with the band on a wide variety of covers. Who are the singers and how did you select the songs?

**JP:** Gino had worked with **Michelle Hill** and **Bianca Sperduti** and suggested that we try a few covers, so we started tossing ideas around. Everyone came up with ideas and we experimented with keys, arrangements, etc. We had already recorded "The Tennessee Waltz" and I asked my old friend Tony Medeiros to give it a go. He responded with characteristic soul and taste. We also brought in Ralph Rosen to play some chromatic harmonica on "Blackbird." We'd LOVE to do more work with Ralph!

**BS:** On the album, I enjoyed the interplay of the musicians and the interesting textures you gave the songs. How did you approach the arrangements?

**JP:** The real strength at the heart of the band is the sound of the two guitars dancing with each other. This became apparent the more gigs we played, so we really tried to emphasize that. With the singers and Ralph, it was just a matter of having them be themselves, simple as that.

**BS:** Any plans for an instrumental release?

**JP:** We're already doing pre-production work on a whole bunch of original instrumental material - mostly written by Gino with a couple from me and Eric. Down the road we plan to record more with a wide variety of guest singers, and there might be an all-Monk project down the road.

**BS:** How has the eclectic Providence music scene affected the group?

**JP:** All of us are freelancers, so you wind up playing with musicians from many different backgrounds and generations in this area. It can't help but have an impact. Plus, we've all been around for a while (three old guys and Eric!) so everything that we've played in the past exerts an influence. People might see Chris Brooks playing steel guitar with Western Stars or Biscuit City and peg him for a straight country musician - but he arranged Coltrane's "Naima" and "Nature Boy" for the band. Gino is a jazzier for sure, but he's writing tunes that come out of gospel, funk and Willie Nelson. Eric can swing his ass off, but I first heard him laying it down in Becky Chase's rockin' "two guitars, bass 'n' drums" band. And I'll play with anybody!

**BS:** Anywhere you normally play around the state?

**JP:** Right now The Parlour in Providence is our regular place to play. We do one Saturday a month there, usually 5 - 8pm on the third Saturday. We're looking to get ourselves into more places and to have more people give us a listen.

**BS:** What can we expect to hear at the release show on March 21?

**JP:** We'll be featuring some of the vocal tunes, the original pieces and some choice instrumental covers (Metheny, Zappa, Stevie, Scofield, Lennon & McCartney, Willie).

*Find all you need to know about Evening Sky at [eveningskyband.com](http://eveningskyband.com).*

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