

# HERBIE NICHOLS, VOL. 1

Summit Records DCD 351 Distributed by Allegro



Eric T. Johnson	guitars
Phil Grenadier	trumpet
George Garzone	tenor and soprano saxophones
Bob Nieske	bass
Nat Mugavero	drums

Produced by Eric T. Johnson  
All music by Herbie Nichols  
Transcribed and arranged  
by Eric T. Johnson

**“One of the year's best CDs.”**

- *Bob Young, Boston Herald*

**“10 superb compositions, played with great respect and innovation.  
10/10.”**

- *Len Dobbin, the Mirror, Montreal, Canada*

**“Highly recommended.”**

- *Ken Dryden, All Music Guide*

**“The best jazz album I've heard yet this year.”**

- *Adam McKibbin, Suite101.com*

"Eric Johnson's fine CD of the music of Herbie Nichols successfully sets this difficult music in a manner which every listener will find accessible. His arrangements provide a fresh instrumental context for the work of this underrated but important jazz composer, and he accomplishes this without compromising or diluting Nichols' original musical content. The playing is superb and appropriate to the style of the compositions."

- *Andy Jaffe, Lyell B. Clay Artist-in-Residence in Jazz and Director of Jazz Performance at Williams College.*

“Thank you and your players for a formidable contribution to this tectonic shift toward the enlightenment of the world's people.”

- *Roswell Rudd, Jazz trombonist and friend of Nichols.*

“... As those who have tried their hand will readily attest, the late pianist's music is far from a walk in the park. Though brimming with beauty, tenderness and melancholy, Nichols' eclectic pen demands utmost sensitivity and discipline from its interpreters. That said, Johnson and company... have clearly done their homework. Throughout the set, the ensemble remains faithful to the material at hand, while infusing it with originality and freshness of their own invention.

Of particular note are Johnson's arrangements, which cast intriguing degrees of shadow and light through harmonic pairings of guitar and horn. On "Love, Gloom, Cash, Love," for instance, Johnson picks delicate, tender lines while Grenadier's trumpet deftly cascades up and down the melody. With "Crisp Day," the contrast is even more dramatic, as Johnson's musing guitar plays parent to Garzone's youthful, frolicking soprano. In both cases, the result is a delightfully textured sound that manifests the depth of Nichols' compositions.

Above all else, Johnson's recording reinforces the fact that, though buried for some 40 years, this material remains compelling and poignant to the ear today. The more musicians endeavor to play this fine music, the more people will get a chance to hear it - and eventually, perchance, the rightful legacy of Herbie Nichols will at last be realized.”

- *Riel Lazarus, AllAboutJazz.com*

“...Johnson's style for the bebop idiom will reach that eclectic audience which this gifted jazz guitarist deserves... Eric has that capability to express his musical ideas with a supra-musical, natural, and an almost childlike expediency. This does not take anything away from his artistry. Kudos to the group, all consummate in their respective crafts.” - *George Carroll, ejazznews.com*

“With this album and the preceding one from The Herbie Nichols Project, *Strange City*, I am now an official Herbie Nichols disciple, having just ordered the Blue Note box set. It's not just that this man was an amazing composer but also that he was born in 1919! Can you say "way ahead of his time?" In my mind, Nichols is to the jazz world what Orson Welles was to the world of film...

Now, Eric T. Johnson has released what looks like a first volume of Nichols covers. They all are engrossing as well as entertaining. They immediately made my heart sing, and I appreciate the quicker version of "Lady Sings the Blues" a great deal. I'll have to listen to *Strange City* again for comparison, but Johnson's band is quite tight, motivated by the music, and experts in the complex structures...

Long story short: Herbie Nichols is a genius, anyone who celebrates his music has a great adventure ahead of him, and artists like Eric T. Johnson, who not only bring Nichols' music to a wider audience but play it extraordinarily well, deserve our heartfelt respect.”

- *Fred Barrett, Beyond Coltrane*

“Johnson does a nice arranging job on these previously recorded tunes and brings out some excellent playing from the musicians.

Altogether, Herbie Nichols, Vol. 1 is a nice collection of great, chewy Herbie Nichols tunes with

interesting arrangements and performances. It's a tasty treat—I'm hungry for Vol. 2.”

- Alan Lankin, *Jazzmatazz*

“I usually don't review CDs, however in this case I will make an exception. Guitarist Eric T. Johnson has recorded a CD featuring the music of the largely forgotten jazz artist Herbie Nichols.

This is a truly captivating CD. The tunes are extraordinary and the playing superb. Eric is not one for dazzling pyrotechnics on guitar. His playing is measured and tasteful, but more than that, he has a great sense for pulling unusual yet striking melodic lines. A bit dissonant in spots, a bit avante garde perhaps, certainly a bit bluesy and bopish in places, but all in all a whole lot of fun to listen to. And this particular style of jazz (on the far side of Monk in many ways) has a certain undeniable charm.

Eric sent me this CD. I get them sometimes and never make it all the way through a complete listening. In this case, I found myself playing it again and again. Not so much to hear any sparkling virtuosity, (although there is plenty of great playing on the CD) but to listen to the music -- both the marvellous tunes and the striking solos. Very refreshing, I must say. So do yourself a favor. Go buy this CD.”

- Doc Dosco, from *WHAT'S HOT WITH JAZZ GUITAR?*, <http://www.docdosco.com>

“The Scoop: The best jazz album I've heard yet this year. Berklee Assistant Professor Eric T. Johnson does some much-needed jazz schoolin' with this collection of transcribed songs from the catalog of neglected jazz titan Herbie Nichols. Johnson picks up where the Blue Note box in 1997 left off, introducing Nichols' compositions to a new audience and, even more impressively, showing enough comprehension and talent in his transcriptions to earn praise from longtime Nichols fans. Nichols challenged the boundaries of jazz, both musically and morally; his arrangements were more difficult than most, and he refused to work with known drug users (a policy that, as Johnson mentions in his succinctly informative liner notes, cost Nichols a chance to record with Billie Holiday). It's not surprising that Charles Mingus was an admirer and helping hand. Johnson, for his part, is a crisply nuanced performer on guitar. It's clear that he has a tremendous emotional and scholarly respect for his subject, but he doesn't chain himself to the originals.”

Highlight Tracks: “It Didn't Happen” and “Crisp Day”

- Adam McKibbin, [Suite101.com](http://Suite101.com)

### **AMG Expert Review:**

“Herbie Nichols' music was appreciated by a mere handful of musicians during his all-too-brief lifetime. Since recordings of Nichols' works have been sporadic, and all of his own interpretations feature only piano, bass, and drums, players must find their own way through each piece. Guitarist Eric T. Johnson is one of many who discovered the late pianist's challenging compositions after his Blue Note and Bethlehem sessions were reissued during the 1990s, but he chose to omit the piano in his transcriptions and arrangements of Nichols' works. With bassist Bob Niese and drummer Nat Mugavero along for the entire ride, and also tenor saxophonist George Garzone and trumpeter Phil Grenadier each appearing on several tracks, Johnson fleshes out Nichols' original trio recordings while remaining true to the spirit of his legacy. Comparisons to Thelonious Monk are an understatement, as this music is often aggressive and full of enough sudden twists and turns to make a musician dizzy. The best of the quintet selections is the fiendishly difficult “It Didn't Happen,” though none of the musicians were thrown in the least by its tricky changes. Nichols' well-known “Lady Sings the Blues,” which was recorded by Billie Holiday, is included, but strangely missing is one of Nichols' other better known songs, “House Party Starting.” But it's a safe bet that Johnson will get around to it for a future volume, because once

anyone has been exposed to the late pianist's captivating compositions, he or she is invariably hooked for life. Highly recommended."

- Ken Dryden, All Music Guide

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