Russell Malone

Those who have been following jazz in the ‘90s have probably wondered about guitarist Russell Malone. As in:"where have his spectacular talents been hiding for the past four years?"

Hiding in plain sight, in Robert Altman´s 1996 movie Kansas City. On records like Stephen Scott´s 1997 release The Beautiful Thing, on Benny Green´s 1997 recording Kaleidoscope. As a member of Diana Krall´s studio and live band, playing on the Grammy-nominated All For You and Love Scenes and touring the world with the vocalist/pianist. Not to mention recordings with Roy Hargrove and Gary Bartz, among others. Believe it, Malone has been anything but inactive.

The only thing Malone didn´t do over the past four years - ironically - is record under his own name. Which is hard to believe for an artist hailed as one of the most promising young musicians to emerge in the past decade. That makes his Impulse! debut Sweet Georgia Peach a cause for more than a bit of celebration. The title is a reference to Malone's home state; a native of Albany, Georgia, he grew up influenced by the deep spirituals of his childhood chruch environment. He received his first guitar - "a green plastic four-string" - at the age of four. A major turning point came when he saw B.B. King play "How Blue Can You Get" on the popular ‘70s TV show "Sanford and Son". That experience led him to listen to more blues, country music, and jazz, and artists like Chet Atkins, Johnny Cash, Wes Montgomery and George Benson.

A self-taught player, he progressed well enough to land a gig with master organist Jimmy Smith when he was 25. ("It made me realize that I wasn´t as good as I thought I was," Malone recalls of his first on-stage jam with Smith.) After two years with Smith, he hooked up with Harry Connick Jr.´s orchestra, a position he held from 1990-94. But Malone also worked in a variety of contexts, performing with artists as diverse as Clarence Carter, Little Anthony, Peabo Bryson, Mulgrew Miller, Kenny Barron, Roy Hargorve, The Winans, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Bucky Pizzarelli, and Jack McDuff.

Along the way, Malone made a name for himself with a sound that combines the bluesy sould of Grant Green and Kenny Burrell with the relentless attack of Django Reinhardt and Pat Martino. On his new album he is helped by an all-star accompaniment from pianist Kenny Barron, bassist Ron Carter, drummer Lewis Nash, and percussionist Steve Kroon.