John McLaughlin & Jimmy Herring

**John McLaughlin and the 4th Dimension**
John McLaughlin / Guitars
Gary Husband / Keyboards and Drums
Etienne M'Bappé / Bass
Ranjit Barot / Drums

**Jimmy Herring and The Invisible Whip**
Jimmy Herring / Guitars
Matt Slocum / Hammond B3 and Clavinet
Jason Crosby / Fender Rhodes and Violin
Kevin Scott / Bass
Jeff Sipe / Drums

Wednesday Evening, November 15, 2017 at 7:30
Michigan Theater
Ann Arbor

21st Performance of the 139th Annual Season
24th Annual Jazz Series
Tonight’s performance is supported by Imagine Fitness & Yoga and by David Sarns and Agnes Moy-Sarns. Funded in part by the JazzNet Endowment Fund. Media partnership provided by Ann Arbor’s 107one, WDET 101.9 FM, WEMU 89.1 FM, and WRCJ 90.9 FM. John McLaughlin and Jimmy Herring appear by arrangement with Abstract Logix Music. In consideration of the artists and the audience, please refrain from the use of electronic devices during the performance. The photography, sound recording, or videotaping of this performance is prohibited.
PROGRAM

Meeting of the Spirits

Jimmy Herring & The Invisible Whip

Intermission

John McLaughlin and the 4th Dimension

Finale: Revisiting Mahavishnu

This evening’s concert runs approximately three hours in duration including one intermission.
Pressed during a recent interview to recount the stratospheric ascent and rapid demise of the original Mahavishnu Orchestra, the storied powerhouse quintet he had founded in 1971 during the nascent days of jazz-rock fusion, the great British guitarist John McLaughlin offered a paradoxical truism: “Failure is easy to deal with, but success is difficult.”

Success came quickly for the first Mahavishnu lineup: McLaughlin, violinist Jerry Goodman, keyboardist Jan Hammer, bassist Rick Laird, and drummer Billy Cobham. Small wonder: even in an explosive young scene that Mr. McLaughlin had helped to kick-start with his fiery 1969 debut LP, Extrapolation; as well as his further work that year in drummer Tony Williams’s groundbreaking trio Lifetime; and, ultimately, alongside the legendary trumpeter Miles Davis; nothing that came before the Mahavishnu Orchestra had hinted at this new band’s singular alchemy.

Front and center was Mr. McLaughlin’s breathtaking technique. In terms of speed, precision, and sheer originality, he was virtually without peer. In Jerry Goodman, Mr. McLaughlin had a counterpart who could match every flurry and spiral, while adding classical poise and folksy rusticity. Jan Hammer, beyond providing eloquent support, was taking the new Minimoog synthesizer to new heights of solo display. Rick Laird supplied the earthy tether for his bandmates’ flights; Billy Cobham matched them all with explosive pyrotechnics, while never foregoing a rock-solid groove.

From its start in July of 1971, the band seemed unstoppable. Following a week of rehearsals, the Mahavishnu Orchestra made its debut in a New York City club. The gig was a success, and the band was asked to return the next week. A few days after that engagement, the quintet made its recording debut, The Inner Mounting Flame, a stunning collection of original McLaughlin compositions that sounds fresh, intense, and otherworldly even now.

The album vividly illustrated what set the Mahavishnu Orchestra apart from its fusion-era peers. While other bands in the burgeoning scene offered mixes of fiery display, virtuoso technical ability, funky grooves, sophisticated jazz harmonies, and psychedelic-rock power, Mr. McLaughlin and his mates balanced power with delicacy and restraint. Sophisticated arrangements helped the group live up to the second half of its name, offering textures that truly reached orchestral heights.

Mr. McLaughlin also showed an appreciation of bucolic, songful British folk music. But what truly helped to cement the Mahavishnu Orchestra’s originality was his abiding fascination with the sinuous melodic lines, complex rhythms, and euphoric flow of Indian classical music. An acolyte of the famous guru Sri Chinmoy, who gave the guitarist the name he bestowed upon his band — a compound of “maha” (great) and Vishnu, the Hindu deity — Mr.
McLaughlin pursued a devotional path. On stage, his spiritual side came out in ecstatic outpourings of joyful sound, abetted and amplified by a powerhouse ensemble. (Really, really amplified, according to many accounts.)

Those disparate elements came into still sharper focus and keener balance on the band’s second album, *Birds of Fire*, released in 1973. By that time the Mahavishnu Orchestra had left nightclubs behind, playing instead to arenas packed with rock sophisticates. One such listener, the insightful music critic Bill Milkowski, described seeing the Mahavishnu Orchestra in 1973, opening for Frank Zappa, in his 1998 book *Rockers, Jazzbos & Visionaries: Interviews with 30 of Contemporary Music’s Most Outstanding and Significant Figures*:

*The leader was dressed in all white and had a spiritual demeanor about him. He put his hands together in a praying gesture before they lit into their first song and humbly asked for quiet in the auditorium. ...[W]hen drummer Billy Cobham, sitting behind an arsenal of drums and roto toms that looked as imposing as a battleship, counted off the first tune and the band jumped on it, my hair stood on end. And when McLaughlin bore down on his double-neck guitar during one solo, I practically fell to my knees with my teeth chattering.*

The English guitar legend Jeff Beck described the sensation more succinctly. “Watching them was an education,” he told Mahavishnu biographer Walter Kolosky for the 2005 book *Power, Passion and Beauty — The Story of the Legendary Mahavishnu Orchestra*. “It was like having your pants ripped off and politely put back on again.”

The Mahavishnu Orchestra had become an extraordinary sensation virtually overnight, any band’s dream — or so it might seem. But for a group of five still-young men, some of whom barely had known each other before conjoining their fates, it was too much, too soon. Poor interpersonal communication and divergent lifestyles fed personal tensions; as importantly, the band simply worked itself weary with its whirlwind tour schedule, playing more than 300 shows in its first two years.

Like Icarus on melting wings, the plummet followed inevitably. Sessions taped in June 1973 for a third studio album — significantly, the first meant to include compositions by other band members — were abandoned. Instead, *Between Nothingness and Eternity*, a live album taped in New York City’s Central Park in August and made up entirely of material from the scrapped LP, would serve as the original Mahavishnu Orchestra’s swan song. (The abandoned tapes, issued in 1999 as *The Lost Trident Sessions*, attested to both lofty goals and flagging spirits.)

Daunted yet still devoted, Mr. McLaughlin soldiered on: with a bigger, more ornate Mahavishnu lineup featuring the prodigious violinist Jean-Luc Ponty and, for one LP, a full symphony orchestra;
with the pioneering acoustic Indian-fusion group Shakti; with an intense trio featuring fellow guitarists Paco de Lucia and Al Di Meola. A third Mahavishnu incarnation surfaced in 1984, featuring prominent guitar synthesizer, the flamboyant electric bassist Jonas Hellborg, and, briefly, Cobham back on the drum throne. Since the 1990s Mr. McLaughlin has fronted a string of distinguished groups under his own name, the latest of which, the 4th Dimension, puts a fresh, personal spin on the trademark fusion of poise and power that marked the original Mahavishnu Orchestra.

That band’s influence has been proclaimed now not only by countless jazz-fusion bands, but also by seemingly unlikely followers: hardcore punk guitarist Greg Ginn of Black Flag, art-rock band the Mars Volta, death-metal group Cynic, and Jimmy Herring, the former Allman Brothers Band guitarist whose teenage discovery of the Mahavishnu Orchestra opened his ears and changed his life.

“When you heard Mahavishnu, it was electric and really loud like rock and roll, but my God...the incredible passion and the rhythmic complexities of what was going on and the deep harmony, that's all part of jazz,” Herring recently told Rolling Stone. “I heard the music, and my reaction was immediate.” How fitting, then, that this particular acolyte should be on hand now to help the master McLaughlin take his final bows before US audiences — and to help fan the Mahavishnu Orchestra’s inner mounting flame once more, for devotees and newcomers alike.

Steve Smith is director of publications at National Sawdust in Brooklyn, New York. He was assistant arts editor at the Boston Globe, where his beat included classical music, pop music, and the visual arts. He also served as a music editor at Time Out New York and contributed to The New York Times as a freelance reporter and critic.
ARTISTS

One of fusion’s most virtuosic guitar soloists, John McLaughlin placed his blazing speed in the service of a searching spiritual passion that has kept his music evolving and open to new influences. Whether shredding on electric or simmering quietly on acoustic, Mr. McLaughlin’s intensity and underappreciated versatility have nearly always kept his playing vital, and his best moments — whether as a solo artist or band member — represent some of fusion’s greatest recordings.

Mr. McLaughlin was born January 4, 1942, in Yorkshire, England, and began playing guitar at age 11. Initially attracted to blues and swing, he worked with British artists like Georgie Fame, Graham Bond, Brian Auger, and Ginger Baker. He formed his own band in 1968, and recorded the excellent debut Extrapolation in early 1969. Later that year he moved to New York to join Tony Williams’ groundbreaking fusion band Lifetime, and appeared on the classic Emergency!. Through Williams, Mr. McLaughlin was invited to join Miles Davis’ band, and became an important part of fusion landmarks like In a Silent Way, Bitches Brew, and A Tribute to Jack Johnson. In 1970, wanting to explore acoustic and Eastern music, he recorded the classic My Goal’s Beyond; he soon left Davis, and after one further solo album, Devotion, he spent some time woodshedding.

He re-emerged in 1971 as leader of the Mahavishnu Orchestra, a seminal band that did much to define and popularize early jazz–rock fusion, as evidenced by the albums The Inner Mounting Flame, Birds of Fire, and Visions of the Emerald Beyond. Pausing to record Love Devotion Surrender with Carlos Santana in 1972, he led Mahavishnu until 1975. Returning to spiritual preoccupations on My Goal’s Beyond, he then formed Shakti, which fused acoustic jazz with Indian classical music over the course of three albums.

In 2008 Mr. McLaughlin issued Floating Point, an extension of many of the concepts on Industrial Zen, on the Abstract Logix imprint. The final track on that album was entitled “Five Peace Band”; it served as the name for a super group assembled by Mr. McLaughlin and Chick Corea for a one-off world tour, presented by UMS in April 2009. The other members were saxophonist Kenny Garrett, drummers Vinnie Colaiuta and Brian Blade, and bassist Christian McBride; an album of the same name was released in 2009 on Concord. To the One, issued in 2010, debuted his new 4th Dimension band, whose lineup included veterans of his other groups: Gary Husband on keyboards and drums, Etienne M’Bappé on electric bass, and drummer Mike Mondesir. This group became a collaborative, creative anchor for the guitarist, much as the early Mahavishnu Orchestra had been.

In October 2016, Mr. McLaughlin announced his farewell tour of America. He invited his favorite guitarist and Abstract Logix label-mate Jimmy Herring to co-bill the tour with him. Billed as “Meeting of the Spirits,” the tour features all the hits from his old and most successful Mahavishnu Orchestra.

American guitarist Jimmy Herring is a musician’s musician. His formidable technique is in service of a vast harmonic and rhythmic imagination, forged by decades on the road and a myriad of influences spanning jazz, rock, country, and the outer limits of improvised music.
This evening’s performance marks John McLaughlin’s third appearance under UMS auspices, following his UMS debut in November 1996 at the Michigan Theater with Al Di Meola and Paco de Lucía. He most recently appeared under UMS auspices with the Five Peace Band (Chick Corea, Brian Blade, Christian McBride, and Kenny Garrett) in April 2009 at Hill Auditorium. UMS welcomes Jimmy Herring and the members of the 4th Dimension and The Invisible Whip, who make their UMS debuts this evening.
The North Carolina native has been playing guitar for close to 40 years, and he's just getting started: the past five years alone have seen him share the stage with one of his musical heroes, reconvene one of the most influential outfits he helped form, set out with a versatile new ensemble, and release his most challenging, dynamic solo album yet.

Now revered in the jazz-rock-fusion and jam band communities, Mr. Herring first honed his guitar at Berklee College of Music and the Guitar Institute of Technology. He emerged on the national scene as a founding member of the seminal outfit Col. Bruce Hampton and The Aquarium Rescue Unit (ARU). The original ARU toured endlessly in the late 1980s and 1990s, dazzling audiences and their fellow musicians with their deft interplay, unpredictable sets, and tireless energy.

In 1997, Mr. Herring joined Butch Trucks, Derek Trucks, John Popper, Kofi Burbridge, Oteil Burbridge, and Marc Quinones to form Frogwings, after which he joined Jazz is Dead with Billy Cobham, Alphonso Johnson, and T Lavitz. Mr. Herring was asked to join the legendary Phil Lesh as a part of his band, which continued for a good part of the decade. During his tenure there, he was asked to join the The Other Ones, the project comprised of former Grateful Dead members. Following the death of beloved guitarist Mike Houser, Widespread Panic asked Mr. Herring to join them in 2006. While the band has recently scaled back its once-constant touring schedule, he continues to perform as their lead guitarist.

Mr. Herring’s longtime admiration for the music of pioneering guitarist, composer, and Mahavishnu Orchestra founder John McLaughlin blossomed into a musical relationship, beginning with Mr. McLaughlin jamming with the ARU at one of their earliest reunion gigs in 2015. That, in turn, led to this year’s Meeting of the Spirits tour, in which separate sets by Mr. Herring and Mr. McLaughlin are followed by the two joining forces for expansive closing jams based on classic Mahavishnu Orchestra material and featuring their first extended collaboration. “Jimmy is simply a great guitar player,” Mr. McLaughlin said at the tour’s outset, “and since we see so eye-to-eye in music, I know we will have some extraordinary musical experiences touring together.”

2017 also marks the debut of Mr. Herring’s new band, The Invisible Whip, which will take part in the Meeting of the Spirits tour and will also perform their own dates independent of John McLaughlin. The band’s repertoire will be drawn from all phases of Mr. Herring’s rich career — including as-yet-unreleased material that will likely surface on his next solo album.
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Supporters of this evening’s performance by John McLaughlin & Jimmy Herring.

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ON THE EDUCATION HORIZON...

11/16–19 New York Philharmonic Residency
Please visit ums.org/nyphil for a complete listing of activities.

11/18    UMS 101: New York Philharmonic Young People’s Concert
(Pioneer High School, 601 W. Stadium Boulevard, 12 noon)
Paid registration required; please visit bit.ly/UMSClasses to register.

12/2    Pre-Show Talk: Musical Text Painting in Handel’s Messiah
(Michigan League Henderson Room, 911 N. University Avenue, 6:00 pm)

Educational events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.