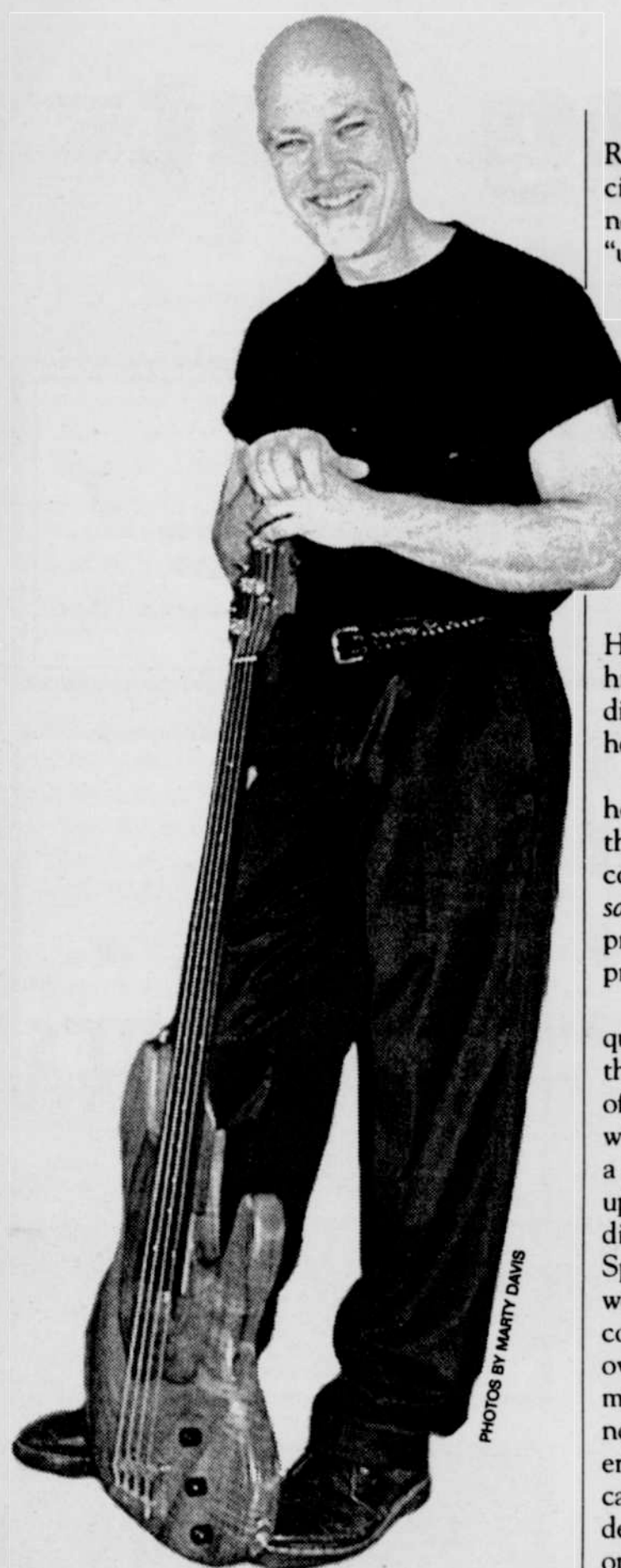


MUSIC



PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS

Deeply felt

Portland bass player reveals himself in an album rich with beauty

BY ORIANA GREEN

"My work presumes that the deepest mysteries lie in the unexplainable attractions to beauty," Rick Crittenden wrote about his paintings of European landscapes. But after hearing his new CD, I believe it also applies to his lush music.

No doubt about it, Crittenden is a real Renaissance man—a painter, composer, musician and former technical designer for an engineering firm. But he has decided to forsake the "ugly world of corporate America" and concentrate on his first loves: music and art.

And, oh yeah, he's also an accomplished tarot card reader, which he uses as a form of meditation. "There are analogies to music; each card in the major arcana is associated with a note," he explains. As for his artwork, you might have seen it on display last month in the Art Tent at Pride 2001.

Although he's played for years as a talented sideman and recorded for Windham Hill and Narada, Crittenden finally has released his own CD, *Passages*. His compositions on this disc were inspired by an earlier tour of Europe he made with the great jazz band Oregon.

The tunes also date back to a time when he was "coming to terms with and realizing that I am gay...I was coming out, so *Passages* seemed an appropriate title for the project."

Fans of Oregon quickly will recognize the lilting horn work of Paul McCandless, which dominates—in a good way—the first upbeat tune on the disc, "Swiss Bell." Sprightly keyboard work by Art Lande contributes to the overall tone of optimism. That mood is not surprising considering the inspiration came when Crittenden was awakened one morning by the sound of 10 tolling church bells in Bern, Switzerland.

Track two, "The Place Between," takes us down a slower, more thoughtful path and at times almost feels like a lament. Drummer Chris Lee does some sensitive brushwork, and the whole quartet sounds very cohesive. This beautiful tune was inspired by the view of a Venice canal.

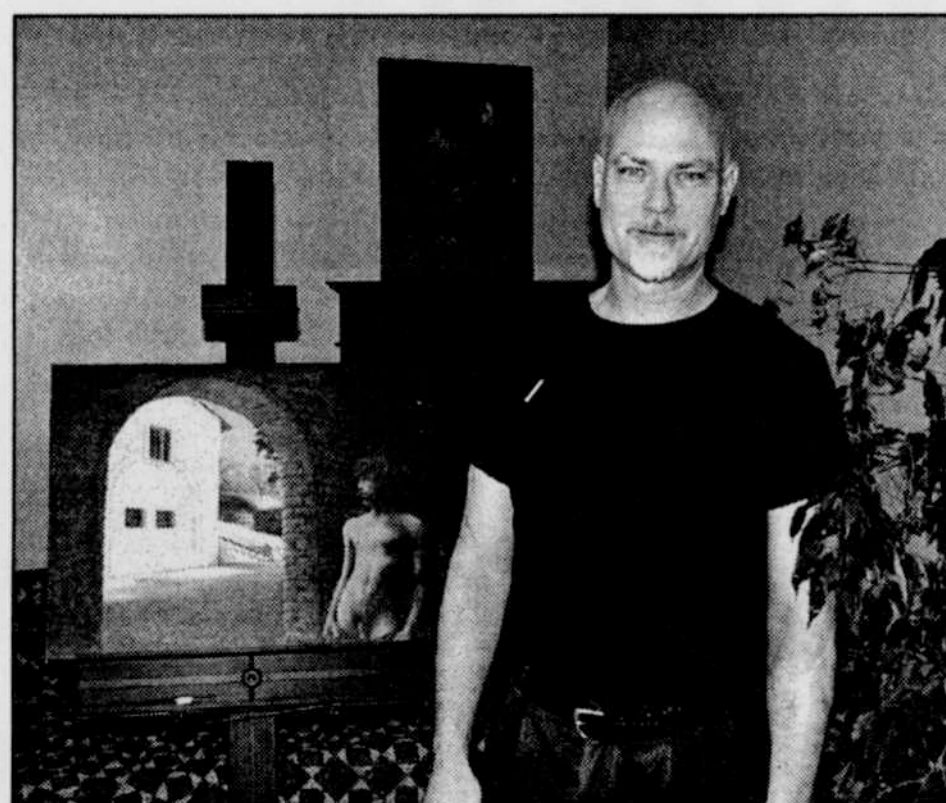
On the next cut, "Crittendude," the group revs the tempo back up to full speed for some impressive experiments with chords and a lack of chord changes. On this one you really can hear why the piano is classified as a percussion instrument.

With the fourth track, "Touching the Stone," Crittenden finally takes the lead. This moody duo with tablas is magical and reflective

and pays homage to a small stone chapel in Assisi, Italy.

Crittenden's mentor is player extraordinaire Glenn Moore (also of Oregon fame), who joins him for an unusual bass duet on the contemplative "Transparent Child." You can feel the vibration in your bones from the bowing of the strings in what feels like a meditation, and you almost can hear a steady mantra in the overtones.

Then just when you think you can peg this album as a spiritually toned essay, Crittenden offers "Now That You've Gone," a languid and dreamy tune that for me paints a mood of martinis in hand-blown glasses at sunset. It's a perfect soundtrack for seduction—or just unwinding after a rough day.



Crittenden is a generous player who accepts that his instrument of choice often works best in a supporting role

Rick Crittenden with two of his paintings

When he carries the melody as he does with this one, Crittenden plays in an emotive way that makes you feel as if you are hearing lyrics. Imagine my surprise when I read the liner notes and learned this tune was suggested not by some hunk in his past but by the death of his mother! (When I confess this to him, Crittenden quips that it just proves "how multipurpose music can be.")

The next cut revisits the same piece but as a lively, uptempo number you'd expect to hear wafting out of some chic penthouse. It features the sophisticated, breezy touch of pianist Lande, who puts out some stylish solos.

Next stop: Florence and the "Uffizi," where Crittenden gets inside the artist's mind with some fun, fast, pizzicato harmonics work on the bass played off soprano sax and oboe. This cre-

ates an airy confection and an air of excitement. It would be easy to visualize this music in some fabulous foreign film. After eight original compositions, the CD ends with the standard "Body and Soul" featuring Nancy King on vocals. Although it's a fine performance, for my taste it distracts from the

cohesive feel of the rest of the album. (At least Crittenden didn't try to sing it himself, unlike the well-known Portland jazz pianist who can't resist vainly inserting his own weak vocal tracks into his otherwise fine discs.) It also feels a shame to end with a vocal number, which suddenly reduces the instrumentalists to accompanists instead of allowing them to final-

ize the album with a strong musical statement.

Crittenden has an ear for fresh melodies and interesting arrangements. And unlike some albums by bass players, this one doesn't force the instrument into a lead position. Crittenden is a generous player who accepts that his instrument of choice often works best in a supporting role.

Overall, whichever combination of instruments are in play, they always blend well, making for a tight group that sounds like they've jammed together for a long time. This nicely

paced CD would be great to play at a cocktail party, because jazz always sounds better to me as the day wanes. Then again, it'd also be nice to wake up to.

Crittenden continues to work steadily as a sideman doing recordings and live gigs. As for playing his music locally, he says, "The direction I'm leaning toward is putting together a concert-type show and touring with it." In the meantime, check out *Passages* at any area music store. **J**

ORIANA GREEN always has been a huge jazz fan, even to the point of toting a trap set around in her hatchback for a special drummer back in her hippie days. Now she's the Entertainment Editor of Just Out and can be reached at oriana@justout.com.

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PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS

SAT	7.21.01	8:00 am	Raceline
		7:00 pm	Blazer Dancer Selection Final
		8:00 pm	Pro wrestling AIW Slams & Jams
SUN	7.22.01	6:30 pm	Portland Fire vs. Detroit Shock
		10:00 pm	Portland Fire: On Fire
MON	7.23.01	8:00 pm	USAR Pro Cup Auto Racing
TUE	7.24.01	6:30 pm	Portland Fire vs. New York Liberty
SAT	7.28.01	6:00 pm	Portland Fire: On Fire
		6:30 pm	Portland Fire vs. LA Sparks in HDTV
MON	7.30.01	6:30 pm	Portland Fire vs. Utah Starzz in HDTV