

**Pianist Jim Beard & Guitarist Jon Herington Join Forces**  
**On Intimate Duet Album, *Chunks and Chairknobs***  
**Project by Steely Dan sidemen scheduled for a September release on Jazzline**

On their first duet project together, seasoned session veterans Jim Beard and Jon Herington explore their rare chemistry together on *Chunks and Chairknobs*. A unique piano-guitar project that organically blends their mutual interest in rock, pop, bossa, blues and jazz while also acknowledging their longstanding gig as sidemen in the game-changing band Steely Dan, this intimate encounter finds the two kindred spirits divvying up duties on eight tunes, easily alternating roles, comping supportively for each other while delivering melodic gems and brilliant solos along the way.

“We did have to think about who could do what where,” said Beard, “because it’s not the most natural duo instrumentation. It’s so much different than if it were piano and bass or guitar and bass, piano and saxophone or guitar and saxophone. Because the two instruments are so similar in the way they function and behave in a group, particularly the chordal aspect of it. So it did take a little bit of think-time to figure out what would be best.” Added Herington, “It’s two instruments that do not necessarily cooperate too well. And because the role of each instrument is similar, it kind of presents a real problem — Who’s going to play the bass part? Who’s going to keep time? So we had to hunt for different tunes and figure out what we could do to them to make them work. And it took quite a while.”

The meticulous craftsmanship and knack for sneaking complex harmonies and chords into song-driven settings here speaks of their long tenure in Steely Dan (Herington joined 20 years ago, Beard 11 years ago). But the two highly empathetic players also bring something unique to the program that places them clearly in their own zone. Beard, a wildly creative spirit with a brilliant, slightly subversive mind, has a wealth of musical experience to draw from. A classically trained pianist, he studied arranging with Don Sebesky and studied piano with Sir Roland Hanna and George Shearing. The keyboardist of choice for John McLaughlin, Wayne Shorter and John Scofield, Beard is also a prolific composer whose signature works have appeared on albums by Michael Brecker (1988’s *Don’t Try This at Home*, 1990’s *Now You See It... Now You Don’t*), McLaughlin (1987’s *Adventures in Radioland*), Bob Berg (1990’s *In the Shadows*, 1994’s *Riddles*) and Bill Evans (1996’s *Escape*, 1997’s *Starfish and the Moon*). As a widely respected producer, he has helmed 11 albums for guitarist Mike Stern as well as projects for drummer Dennis Chambers, trumpeter Michael “Patches” Stewart, violinist Didier Lockwood, pianist Eliane Elias, trumpeter Randy Brecker and saxophonists Berg and Evans. His compositional prowess and quirky penchant is further showcased on his six albums as a leader — 1990’s *Song of the Sun*, 1994’s *Lost at the Carnival*, 1997’s *Truly*, 1999’s *Advocate*, 2008’s *Revolutions* and 2013’s *Show of Hands*. Herington, a consummate accompanist, soulful rhythm guitar player and tasty soloist, has brought his six-string skills to bear on recordings by Steely Dan (2000’s *Two Against Nature*, 2003’s *Everything Must Go*), Donald Fagen (2006’s *Morph The Cat*, 2012’s *Sunken Condos*), Walter Becker (2008’s *Circus Money*) and Madeleine Peyroux (2016’s *Secular Hymns*, as well as his own albums as a leader — 1992’s *The Complete Rhyming Dictionary*,

2000's *Like So*, 2008's *Pulse and Cadence*, 2010's *Shine, Shine, Shine*, 2012's *Time On My Hands* and 2016's *Adult Entertainment*.

“The idea of doing a record didn’t come first,” explained Beard. “About two and a half years ago we did a short mid-Atlantic States tour just to try it out, and it worked out pretty well. In fact, a European agent said he could book a tour for us if we had an album out. So we decided to do one.”

The two musical partners met back in 1981 in Bloomington, Indiana, where Beard was a student at Indiana University. Native New Jerseyite Herington, who grew up in Springsteen country on the Jersey Shore in West Long Branch, had relocated to nearby Indianapolis, birthplace of his guitar idol Wes Montgomery. “In 1981, I rolled the dice and moved to Indianapolis, basically following a girlfriend who I had met in New Jersey but who had been planning to move back to Indiana when I met her,” Herington explained. “I went out there thinking I wouldn’t even make a living playing music, and much to my delight and surprise, within two weeks I was doing gigs in little jazz clubs around Indianapolis and later doing sessions and jingles at a couple of studios there. So I got the experience of doing session work without the stress and competition of New York. I ended up working there for three years and became a big fish in a little pond, in a way. And I also got to play gigs with veterans on the scene like Killer Ray Appleton, Pookie Johnson and Buddy Montgomery, all guys who had worked with Wes early on in his career. That was a great thing for my jazz playing.”

“The first time we met is actually the first time we played music together,” recalled Beard of his initial encounter with Herington in the nearby campus town of Bloomington. “It was a party/jam session. The way we noticed each other was purely musical. There was an affinity right away.” They would eventually form a band with some of Beard’s pals from Indiana University, including future stars like trumpeter Chris Botti, bassist Robert Hurst, and drummers Kenny Aronoff and Shawn Pelton.

Fast-forward to the mid ‘80s, when both made their move to the Big Apple. “I came back to New York in August of 1984 and Jim arrived about a year later,” said Herington. “I struggled for many years to make money, playing in pick up bands on Bleecker Street, then putting on a tuxedo and going out to Long Island on the weekends to play bar mitzvahs and weddings. Whatever it took to pay the rent. But one of the most satisfying opportunities I did get was working on many of the records that Jim and I did together. He had just gotten to New York and quickly became the guy to call for production and arranging on a lot of the post-Miles, post-Weather Report music that was happening at the time. So he would do these recording projects — Bob Berg, Randy Brecker, Michael Brecker, Bill Evans, Eliane Elias, Dennis Chambers — and he would call me on almost all of them, which was fabulous and fun.”

It was many years later that Herington hooked up with Steely Dan. As he recalled, “I did the first session for them in the Fall of ’99 when they were finishing *Two Against Nature*, their first studio record in about 18 years. And that came about through a guy I had met in the *Tommy* pit band, a keyboard player named Ted Baker. He had been playing on all of the rhythm session dates for *Two Against Nature*, which was like three years in the making. That was Steely Dan’s habit in the

days when record budgets were limitless. That was probably the final project where they had that kind of money to burn. But Ted had recommended me because they wanted somebody to come in and play rhythm guitar on a few tunes. And somewhere during the course of the four or five sessions I did, they asked me if I wanted to tour. And, of course, I said yes. I joined in 2000 and that was a huge touring year for Steely Dan. And we not only did a DVD for PBS, we also did David Letterman's show, Jay Leno's show, a Japanese tour, a European tour and a U.S. tour. For me, it was pretty magical because I had never really been touring before, certainly not on that level. And it actually put me on the map as a touring musician because I got calls soon after that from Boz Scaggs and Bette Midler. It changed my work scene completely."

*Chunks and Chairknobs* was recorded following a brief duo tour the two conducted last year during some downtime in their Steely Dan duties. "The idea was to find places with good pianos and do a short little tour within driving distance of New York, just so we could try it out," explained Beard. "So we rehearsed a bit and jumped in and did six gigs over the course of a couple of weeks. And it was difficult and very revealing, because you're so exposed in that duo setting. Guitar and piano together is kind of unfriendly instrumentation. It puts us in a challenging place but we found ways to make it work. And after a while it started feeling more comfortable and natural, so we felt like it was worth pursuing."

From the jaunty title track, colored by Beard's New Orleans flavored barrelhouse piano to Herington's thoughtfully introspective "Double Blind" and Beard's soothing "Hand to Hand" to fresh interpretations of Bill Evans' "Loose Blues," the standard "Baubles, Bangles and Beads," the show tune "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man" and the popular Steely Dan anthem, "Gaucho," the two longtime collaborators put their own unique spin on the proceedings. A thoroughly engaging project, *Chunks and Chairknobs* is the result of what happens when two seasoned pros with longstanding, indelible chemistry get together in the studio to create. Magic ensues.