

SPIN CONTROL

Sun-Times reviews look
at what's new on the charts

Recently released recordings are rated on a scale between
★ (poor) and ★★★★★ (essential).

Irène Schweizer, "Chicago Piano Solo"

(Intakt) ★★★★★ Jazz

I've been kicking myself for missing Swiss free jazz pianist Irène Schweizer's solo performance at the Empty Bottle in early 2000. Now that at least part of it is documented on CD, I'm thinking I should have kicked myself twice as hard. This is one of the most enthralling recitals I've heard in a long time, one that is so alert and alive in its masterly changes in tempo and tone, so ceaselessly rewarding from a melodic and rhythmic perspective and so two-fistedly potent in a percussive sense, there is no base it doesn't cover.

Can it be that *The Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD* declared that Schweizer is "not a natural unaccompanied performer"? She is never not in her element, whether creating a harmonic whirlwind with her independent hands, hammering down McCoy Tyner-like bass patterns to spring her dancing high notes, or reaching inside the instrument to coax atmospheric effects from the strings. The only reason that "Chicago Piano Solo" doesn't have me re-kicking myself is that, thanks to the superb engineering by local wiz Malachi Ritscher, she sounds better coming through the headphones than she would have in the club. For maximum appreciation, just make sure you picture her at the immaculate white piano the Bottle provided her with that night.

Lloyd Sachs