

## Music Notes

## Jazz Beat-les

## John Pizzarelli puts swing into the Fab Four

By MICHAEL GILTZ

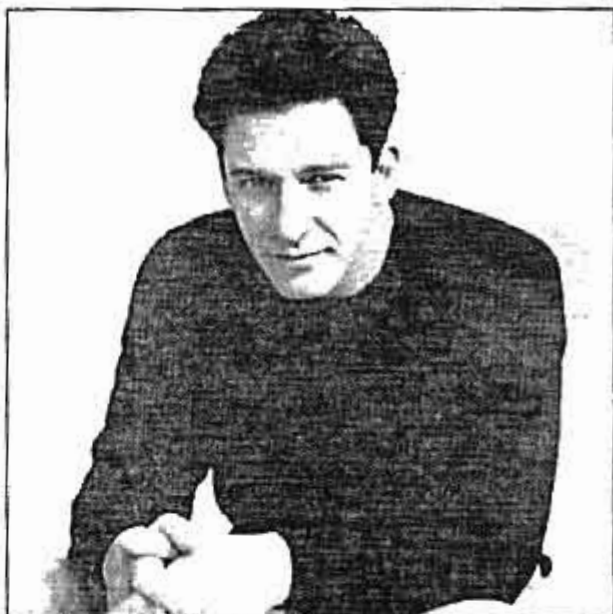
**Y**OU would think that John Pizzarelli, a singer and jazz guitarist who devoted an album entirely to The Beatles, would be a record company's crossover dream.

But he isn't, and the 38-year-old New Jersey native was astonished at the initial response he received after recording "John Pizzarelli Meets The Beatles" last March. In fact, RCA Victor held back the release of his album until this month.

"When I brought in this record, I thought it would be great," says Pizzarelli, who's currently in the midst of a month-long stand at the Algonquin. "We have all the worlds — it's still jazz, but it's The Beatles. Industry people walked out of the room, one guy at a magazine said it was a bad career move, and folks who ordinarily promote records said they wouldn't. I kept thinking, 'Who are these people?'"

But success ultimately came from another route. The album scaled the jazz charts in Japan — where Pizzarelli has always been popular — and an advance tape secured his trio a coveted slot at a Montreal jazz festival. That, in turn, led to his taping a concert for Canadian national television. "They liked it, so how bad can it be?" jokes the droll musician from his Manhattan apartment.

The son of legendary jazz guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli, he is used to causing a stir, whether



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tweaking his dad during concerts by playing licks from Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple, or dabbling in rock during his "rebellious" years with a band called Johnny Pick and His Seabs.

"When I was in my Peter Frampton phase and playing along with one of his records," recalls Pizzarelli, "my dad would say, 'Well, that's great.' Then he'd put on a Django Reinhardt record and say, 'Why don't you copy *this* solo?'"

Pizzarelli quickly realized he didn't have to rock 'n' roll to be daring and innovative. And hav-

ing legends like Benny Goodman and Zoot Sims hanging around the house as role models didn't hurt either.

Pizzarelli eventually took up the same, rare seven-string guitar his dad plays and even toured with him for years.

In the late '80s, Pizzarelli formed his own trio, with Ray Kennedy on piano and younger brother Martin on bass. During the past decade they've toured constantly, recorded nine albums and appeared on everything from "Mezzrow Place" to "The Tonight Show" and (just last Wednesday) "Late Night with Conan O'Brien." Pizzarelli also played on Broadway in '97 with the short-lived Johnny Mercer revue "Dream."

When he started out, Pizzarelli would only perform instrumentally during the first half of his concerts, then sing in the second half. But his singing has taken more and more prominence over the years, and now Pizzarelli's light tenor sounds stronger than ever, thanks to vocal exercises and constant touring. His voice shines throughout "Meet The Beatles," which covers Fab Four classics in various jazz styles.

"'Can't Buy Me Love' is a Woody Herman record," he explains, "marring 'Can't Buy Me Love' with 'Woodchoppers' Ball.' 'Here Comes the Sun' is performed like Joao Gilberto. And we did 'When I'm 64' the way Joe Mooney would have done it, with an accordion and a clarinet and a couple of new lyrics on the end."

"I considered doing 'Revolution' real slow, you know, [and he starts singing] 'You say you want a revolution.' But I was worried it would sound like Bill Murray's routine on 'Saturday Night Live' and we didn't want to do that."



"John Pizzarelli Meets The Beatles," which was recorded last March, was recently released on RCA/Victor.