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[Lenny White – Live from 97 \(2013\)](#)

by [Nick DeRiso](#)

The truth is, both of the late-1990s Lenny White-led solo releases that preceded the Japanese concert featured here needed a little scuffing up, and this group happily obliges. Muscular new versions of “East St. Louis,” “Wolfbane and “Dark” from 1995’s *Present Tense*, and “Whew! What a Dream” and “Pickpocket” from 1996’s *Renderers of Spirit* serve as highlights on the new archival *Live from 97* release.

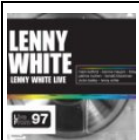




They retain much of the keyboard-driven crossover appeal of the studio releases, even as a unit that includes fellow Miles Davis alumni Bernie Maupin and Foley take these tunes into boisterous new fusion-stoked places. The results are layered and endlessly fascinating, sometimes completely outside and other times accessible and fun — like a combination of *Bitches Brew* (which featured both White and Maupin) and *Amandla* (which included Foley).

[**ONE TRACK MIND:** [Lenny White stopped by to cook up another batch of bitches brew, get a little softifunky and then take us on board for another journey to vulcan worlds.](#)]

White’s band on *Live from 97* — due March 19, 2013 from BFM Jazz — also includes synth player Donald Blackman (a former Twennynine band mate) and the late trumpeter and vocalist Mark Ledford, but perhaps most intriguing is the pairing of Weather Report alum Victor Bailey in a two-bass tandem featuring Foley — brilliantly featured on “East St. Louis.” Ultimately, that 20-minute track becomes a showcase for White’s deep and talented unit, highlighted by a scorching turn by Maupin. Foley’s distorted rock-inflected asides, both there and on “Dark,” are a wonder.

Then there's Ledford, who turns in a muted solo on "East St. Louis" and on the subsequent "Pick pocket" that draws a straight line back to Davis' influence, as well. The set begins and ends with "Whew! What a Dream," a groove-focused blast of J.B. Horns-style horns. White's band is rounded out by pianist Patrice Rushen.

Holding it all together is White, who wisely lays back, stating and restating each song's central cadence, always working as the consummate host and enabler — that is, until "Wolfbane," when the long-time Return to Forever rhythmist explodes into a thunderous solo, unleashing a groove that could bring down buildings.

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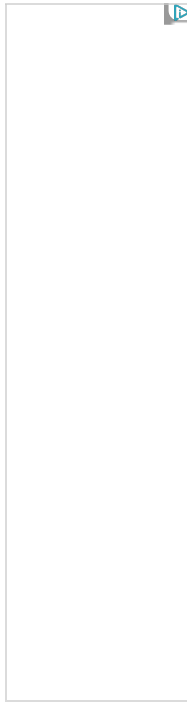
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