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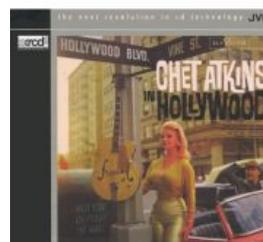
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*A country guitar legend records in Hollywood and enhances his legacy.*

## Chet Atkins – Chet Atkins In Hollywood – RCA Victor LSP-1993 {1959/1961}/Speakers Corner Records (2016), 180-gram stereo vinyl 35:47 \*\*\*\* $\frac{1}{2}$ :

(Chet Atkins – guitar; Howard Roberts – guitar; Jethro Burns – mandolin; Clifford Hill – bass; George Callender – bass; Larry Bunker – drums; Jack Sperling – drums; with Dennis Farnon and His Orchestra)

Chet Atkins was a transcendent country music star. He worked his way



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up through the traditional country scene as a guitarist. He also played mandolin, fiddle banjo and ukulele. The list of artists he backed was extensive, including Hank Snow, The Carter Family, and Red Foley. Atkins was known for popularizing the Merle Travis guitar technique, using the thumb and two or three finger to pick. As a “hired hand” Atkins was good enough to be inducted into the *Grand Old Opry* in the 50’s. But Atkins’ musical legacy may have been defined by his work as a producer. Along with Owen Bradley and Bob Ferguson, Chet Atkins helped to define the *Nashville* sound, reducing fiddle and banjo instrumentation and injecting more dynamic sound mixes. Atkins won 14 *Grammys* and 9 Country Music Awards. He was inducted into the *Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame* and *The Country Music Hall Of Fame*.

Atkins primarily considered himself a guitarist. His instrumental prowess encapsulated many other genres including jazz. Atkins once performed at *The Newport Jazz Festival*. In 1959, he surprised the country music establishment by recording an album in Hollywood with lush string arrangements. *Chet Atkins In Hollywood* (which was re-mixed in 1961 by Atkins) showed what a brilliant guitarist could do with a wide variety of compositions. Speakers Corner has re-mastered these sessions to 180-gram vinyl. Side 1 opens with a cover of the most unlikely song (“Armen’s Theme”) by Ross Bagdasarian Sr., later known as David Seville of Alvin And The Chipmunks fame. Atkins embraces the Armenian melodic context with his succinct playing and precise, syncopation. Starting with primal electric guitar, the gossamer strings begin the second verse. Then Atkins lays down some country strumming. “Let It Be Me” (originally written as “Je t’appartiens” in 1955), enjoyed success in France and then as a smash hit for The Everly Brothers in 1960. It is impossible to clear out the over-the-top sentimental resonance, but Atkins’ echo-infused electric guitar is effective in “voicing” the melody. The strung accompaniment is restrained.

One of the most iconic film score moments is the William Holden/Kim Novak dance scene in *Picnic*. The dramatic “Picnic “Theme” interlude (within the “Moonglow” tune) is re-purposed by “Mr. Guitar”, focusing solely on the theme song. Atkins succinct phrasing intermingles with the string counterpoint and approximates the sweeping romanticism that is



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at the core of this song (written by Morris Stoloff). It is forever stunning. A minor hit in 1958, Boudleau Bryant's "Theme From A Dream" is a master class of graceful picking and updated studio engineering. Atkins' agility and strength as a guitarist permit him to stand up to an entire string section. There are two up-tempo transitions that are mesmerizing. Atkins reaches out for eclecticism on Manuel Ponce's "Estrellita". It is core balladry, but with a lot of

finesse and signature runs on guitar. Here, the strings impede the momentum slightly. Fats Waller's "Jitterbug Waltz" showcases the visceral connection between jazz and country, in the hands of an accomplished musician. The string arrangements emphasize both harmony and counterpoint. Atkins approach is understated, but with great rhythmic complexity.

Side 2 has interesting material from many diverse songwriters. Atkins executes a faithful rendition of Hoagy Carmichael's "Little Old Lady". The short intro and the trademark loping rhythm is a natural fit. The strings dress it up, similar to the Ray Noble Orchestra 1936 original. The catchy melody line and Americana roots are infectious. Atkins' guitar bravado is polyrhythmic. Another inspired cover is Charlie Chaplin's "Limelight". Here the string augmentation works extremely well. The haunting melody is captured on guitar with a touch of Spanish flair and cinematic aesthetics. "The Three Bells" (a.k.a. "Little Jimmy Brown") is another unusual selection. There have been so many covers (Floyd Cramer, The Andrew sisters, Andy Williams, The Browns, Elvis Presley, Dolly Parton, Perry Como among many others), that an instrumental seems like a breath of fresh air. Great musicians can take familiar tunes and turn them into personal statements. Atkins accomplishes this on both "Santa Lucia" and "Greensleeves". His nimble



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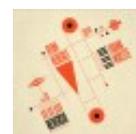
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fingering techniques and modern studio production are game changers. There is no better finale than “Meet Mr. Callaghan”. Recorded by Atkins’ (and everyone else’s) favorite guitarist Les Paul in 1952, Chet somehow combines an Irish jig with a country twang. In his inimitable style he infuses the chorus with jazzy notation.

*Chet Atkins In Hollywood* still has considerable artistic integrity. The audacity of combining the premier country guitarist with strings in Hollywood was a big gamble. It excels because of the phenomenal setlist and its instrumental brilliance. Also, the actual sound mix was progressive in 1961 and with the superior re-mastering at Speakers Corner is even better. The balance with the strings and Atkins is delicate and vibrant. The guitar echo and fade effects sound like a contemporary recording, not something from 1959 or 1961. The “very 60’s” Hollywood And Vine album cover with the “James Bondish” blonde and the electric guitar on the signpost is historical. The original liner notes include RCA Victor’s Living Stereo information and notes on 317X antistatic ingredient are glimpses into the legacy of analog recording.

### TrackList:

*Side 1:* Armen’s Theme; Let It Be Me; Theme from Picnic; Theme From A Dream; Estrellita; Jitterbug Waltz

*Side 2:* Little Old Lady; Limelight; The Three Bells; Santa Lucia; Greensleeves; Meet Mr. Callaghan

–Robbie Gerson

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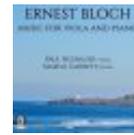
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