

## PRESS PLAY

# Steven Halpern's 'Among Friends' more than meditative

By Paul Liberatore

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You can tell how respected musicians are in their field by the quality of the guests who appear on their records. Since his first album, "Chakra Suite" in 1975, San Anselmo's Steven Halpern, a founding father of new age music, has featured some of the finest musicians in new age and jazz on the more than 100 albums he's produced.

Many of them appear on the Grammy-nominated keyboardist's 40-year retrospective, "Steven Halpern: Among Friends: 1975 - 2015." The late flautist Paul Horn joins Halpern on a couple of tracks, including an unrehearsed duet on "Shared Secrets" that finds Horn improvising an elegant melodic line around Halpern's inventive chord changes.

Paul McCandless, of the pioneering acoustic jazz group Oregon, improvises soulfully on oboe on a track from "Deep Alpha," a Grammy-nominated album that spent 27 weeks on Billboard's new age Top Ten chart.

Jai Uttal, Halpern's longtime friend and San Anselmo neighbor, adds guitar synthesizer to the percussive African drums of the late sound shaman Suru Ekeh on the title track of the album "Afro-Desia."

Marin bassist Michael Manring's sinewy melodic lines and harmonic overtones on fretless electric bass grace "Paradigm Shift," a track from the album of the same name. Dallas Smith, whom Halpern met on stage at a concert on Mount Tamalpais in 1980, weaves breathy lines from Lyricon wind synthesizer and bamboo flute around Halpern's grand piano and the shimmering electric harp textures of Susan Mazer on a pair of tracks, including "Lifetide" from the album "Shifting Focus."

Schawkie Roth on Bansuri bamboo flute and dumbek master Mark Bell guest on 2000's "Deja Blues," Halpern's most commercially successful album, reaching No. 18 on Billboard's new age chart.

Recognized by Keyboard magazine in 1995 as "one of the 12 most influential artists of the past 20 years," Halpern showcases his all-around musicianship on these tracks, playing piano, Fender Rhodes electric keyboard, electric guitar and bass and sampled tabla.

Originally a New York jazz-rock musician, Halpern returns to his roots, playing an inspired trumpet solo on the appropriately titled "In Another Life," a cut from his album "Shifting Focus."

Also guesting are flau-



## LOCAL REVIEW

**This week:** "Among Friends: 1975-2015, a 40-Year Retrospective," Steven Halpern, independent, [stevenhalpern.com](http://stevenhalpern.com), CD \$14.98, MP3, \$8.88

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tists Jorge Alfano and Kat Epple, vocalist Melissa Phillippe, bassists Marc van Wageningen and David Friesen, cellist David Darling, dumbek player Jeff Deen and percussionists Kenneth Nash and George Marsh.

While Halpern's music is known for its meditative and healing properties, the masterful jazz improvisation and world fusion collaborations on this stellar collection could make even the most soporific listener wake up and take notice.