



Steve Tibbetts
Life Of
 ECM 2599

★★★★★

Because there's so much atmosphere in Steve Tibbetts' music—the reverb-laden guitar, ghostly piano chords, quiet washes of percussion—it can be easy to assume that atmosphere is all he's got. After all, the guitarist is not one for big, brash melodies or deeply funky grooves, nor do his tunes offer anything like the easily decoded structure of pop songcraft. And when the narrative is hard to follow, it's all too tempting to assume there isn't one at all.

With *Life Of*, his 10th solo album, Tibbetts makes it easier to follow the thread by present-

ing a series of sonic portraits, each one offered as a "Life Of." It's not storytelling in any conventional sense, but it does lend a certain specificity to the mood and vocabulary of each piece.

"Life Of Emily," for example, opens with Tibbetts playing in a sliding, vocalized style that, along with Marc Anderson's hand percussion, evokes the sound of Indian classical music. But about 13 seconds in, the drone beneath those soothingly serpentine lines drops a minor third, and the mood shifts. Although Tibbetts continues to play slippery, string-bending filigrees, the rhythmic pulse quietly has become more insistent. It's drama, but of a sort so subtle it easily can be missed without close listening.

Pay close attention, though, and *Life Of* reveals a world of sonic surprises. With "Life Of Mir," it's relentlessly shifting harmony and splashes of Michelle Kinney's cello; with "Life Of Dot," it's harmonics pulled from bent strings to give each note unique flavor; with "Life Of Alice," it's the intertwining rhythms of finger-picked guitar, sampled gamelan and piano. It might be less than an hour long, but *Life Of* will provide years of deep and rewarding listening.

—J.D. Considine

Life Of: Bloodwork; Life Of Emily; Life Of Someone; Life Of Mir; Life Of Lowell; Life Of Joel; Life Of Alice; Life Of Dot; Life Of Carol; Life Of Joan; Life Of El; End Again; Start Again. (50:39)

Personnel: Steve Tibbetts, guitar, piano; Marc Anderson, percussion, handpan; Michelle Kinney, cello, drones.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

