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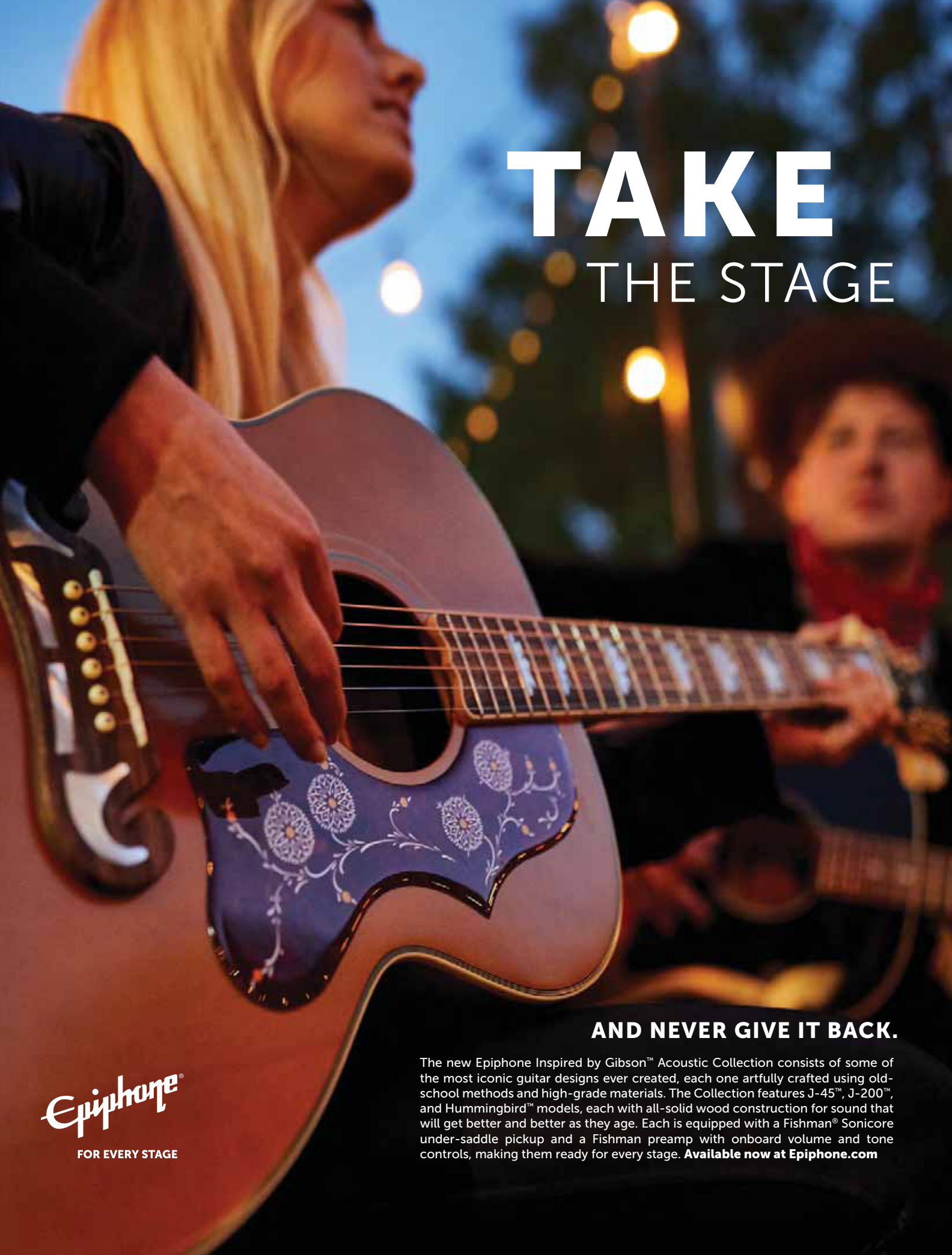
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CONTENTS

JEROMIE B. STEPHENS



“Everybody sounded better when they played with Tony Rice.”

CHRIS ELDRIDGE

p. 32

Features

20 Acoustic Soul

Inside the songs and guitar style of Bill Withers

By Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers

28 A Personal Touch

Irina Kulikova explores her formative influences as a child prodigy in Russia

By Mark Small

Special Focus Remembering Tony Rice

32 Béla Fleck, Richard Hoover, David Grisman, Chris Eldridge, and Bryn Davies share their reflections on this giant of bluegrass guitar

By Molly Tuttle

Miscellany

10 The Front Porch

14 Community

16 Feedback

50 Acoustic Guitar Showcase

76 Luthiers' Row

81 Ad Index

May/June 2021

Volume 31, No. 6, Issue 328

On the Cover

Tony Rice

Photographer

Jeromie B. Stephens



SETUP

18 Guitar Talk

Stories of Jimmy Buffett's guitar collection

By James Rotondi

PLAY

42 Here's How

Using effects pedals with acoustic guitars

By John W. Warren

44 The Basics

Fleshing out chord-melody work with tremolo picking and passing chords

By Greg Ruby

48 Woodshed

An open-G slide arrangement of "Poor Boy, Long Ways from Home"

By Jontavious Willis

52 Weekly Workout

Colorful folk, country, and bluegrass licks for warming up or composing

By Cathy Fink

SONGS

56 Acoustic Classic: Lovely Day

Play one of Bill Withers' late-'70s hits

By Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers

58 Pickin': Beaumont Rag

Tony Rice's take on a famous fiddle tune

By Alan Barnosky

62 Campfire: Let Me Call You Sweetheart

Cowboy chords and a hint of jazz

By Kate Koenig

AG TRADE

64 Makers & Shakers

Famed repair master Dan Erlewine branches out with a new signature guitar

By E.E. Bradman

68 Ask the Expert

The delicate art of fretwork

By Martin Keith

70 Review: Cole Clark AN2EC-BLBL-HUM

New guitar with brilliant acoustic and electric tones

By Matt Blackett

72 Review: Córdoba Fusion 5

Affordable nylon-string with built-in electronics

By Nick Millevoi

74 Review: Mojotone Quiet Coil NC-1

Magnetic soundhole pickup avoids common pitfalls

By Doug Young

76 Review: Augustine Imperial and Regal Strings

Colorful relaunched sets from nylon-string maker

By Mark Small

MIXED MEDIA

78 Playlist

Chris Pierce's incisive protest songs; M. Ward revisits a Billie Holiday classic; sublime tunes from Suzzy Roche and Lucy Wainwright Roche; Hazar's *Reincarnated* features flash and beauty; troubadour Rod Abernethy's sensitive story-songs; classical guitarist Gaëlle Solal's *Tuhu* celebrates Villa-Lobos; Vivian Leva and Riley Calcagno build on old-time and country roots

82 Great Acoustics

2020 Collings OM3 Alaskan

By Greg Olwell



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Video Exclusives



LEARNING FROM THE BEST

Molly Tuttle reflects on and demonstrates some of the Tony Rice licks that made the late guitarist one of her musical heroes. (p. 32)



"POOR BOY BLUES"

Learn a slide banjo-inspired classic in open G. (p. 48)



SIX-STRING STORIES

Jimmy Buffett on his vintage Martin and more. (p. 18)



COLE CLARK "ANGEL"

Heavenly acoustic-electric tone from Down Under. (p. 70)

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THE FRONT PORCH

Tony Rice



TIM VALLEY

Near the end of last year, a friend texted two words to me—"Tony Rice"—and I got a sinking feeling about what the message was about. It turned out that Rice had died suddenly on Christmas Day at the age of 69. Though he had not performed publicly since 2013 due to tendinitis and arthritis, Rice's passing came as a painful surprise to the legions of musicians and fans in awe of his superhuman musical persona.

Rice emerged in the 1970s as a guitar force, and over the course of his four-decade career elevated the art of flatpicking guitar while modernizing bluegrass. Though his work was deeply entrenched in tradition, Rice also borrowed freely from pop, jazz, classical, and other styles to find new modes of expression—the sort of synthesis that is obvious on one of his signature compositions, "Manzanita." It is impossible to overstate his towering influence on the acoustic guitar world; virtually any picker who came after Rice is heavily indebted to him.

In the flurry of remembrances posted in the days after Rice's death, I came across a tribute that Molly Tuttle wrote for NPR, titled "Tony Rice Was My Guitar Hero." Tuttle, one of the great guitarists of her generation, is usually the one being interviewed in this magazine, but this time she traded roles and talked to a group of those fortunate enough to have collaborated with and learned from Rice at various stages of his career. In Tuttle's excellent cover story, Béla Fleck, Richard Hoover, David Grisman, Chris Eldridge, and Bryn Davies all share what they took away from their time with Rice, shedding some light on his enigmatic personality and his intentional but spontaneous approach to music-making.

Plenty of Rice transcriptions are readily available in songbooks and on the internet, but the guitarist's arrangement of the traditional song "Beaumont Rag" is not among these sources. Because of that—and because the straightforward tune is a good entry point for anyone looking to delve into Rice's approach—we present a new transcription in the Pickin' department. Alan Barnosky gets under the hood of "Beaumont Rag," showing how to play it both with Rice's economical right-hand approach and standard alternate picking.

Though Jimmy Buffett would be the first to admit that he is not the virtuoso that Tony Rice was, he is quite the guitar connoisseur, with a collection ranging from a late-1800s Martin 0-28 to a Benedetto archtop. He's also a great interview, full of colorful stories, as is clear from this installment of *Guitar Talk* by regular contributor James Rotondi. In *Makers & Shakers*, Buffett's contemporary Dan Erlewine chats with E.E. Bradman about his long career as one of the guitar world's most visible repair techs, as well as a vintage-inspired new collaboration with Iris Guitars.

In keeping with the magazine's mission of covering all things acoustic guitar, other stories in this issue are all over the map and include a lesson on R&B legend Bill Withers' guitar style, along with an arrangement of his hit "Lovely Day"; a profile of the Russian classical guitarist Irina Kulikova; and bluesman Jontavious Willis' interpretation of "Poor Boy, Long Ways from Home." I hope you find plenty of things on these pages that inspire you to pick up your guitar and try something new.

—Adam Perlmutter

Adam.Perlmutter@Stringletter.com



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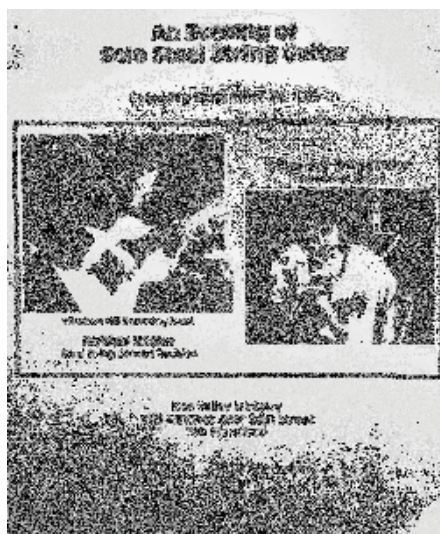
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Your review of the new Yamaha FGX3 (March/April 2021) sent me down a delightful reminiscence rabbit hole. In my memory it was 1967 when Coast Music in San Francisco advertised their first shipment of the new Yamaha FG-180. My underage self scrounged a ride in from Marin with a pocket full of lawnmowing earnings. There, covering the entire west wall of the store, was an array of 100 FG-180s, priced at \$99 each. I spent the next hour or two playing one guitar after another. Later I claimed to have played all hundred of them before choosing mine, but I likely did go through dozens before one particular guitar sang particularly clearly and the notes fell particularly easily under my fingers. That FG-180 was my baby for the next ten years and, no knock on all those other FG-180s, it had magical qualities. I once declined a straight-across trade offer for a Martin D-18, not out of brand loyalty, but because my FG-180 was so clearly superior. I can only wish that the FGX3 provides today's players the cosmic joy that its inspirational forebear did for me.

—Danny Carnahan, via email



A SWEET SOUL

I read the article on Robbie Basho in the March/April issue and found it very interesting. I want to share with you that when I got to California in 1985 and was trying to build my career, Robbie agreed to a double-bill gig in San Francisco. A few days later, he invited me

to his apartment to show me his music. He was working on a guitar concerto, I believe. Robbie was a peculiar and old-fashioned gentleman with a sweet soul, and he made an impression on me. So much so that I wrote a piece, "Goodbye Robbie," after finding out that he died not that long after our concert.

Here I've enclosed the flyer for that concert organized by Larry Kassin. Funny, I just noticed that in the flyer they used my real name, Giuseppe, instead of Peppino.

—Peppino D'Agostino, via email

THE REAL NITTY GRITTY

In the March/April edition you noted that "Mr. Bojangles" became a pop standard, recorded by John Denver, Bob Dylan, Whitney Houston, and others." Give credit where it's due. This was the greatest hit that the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band ever recorded, and probably sold more than all those other artists combined.

—Bob Bowden, via email

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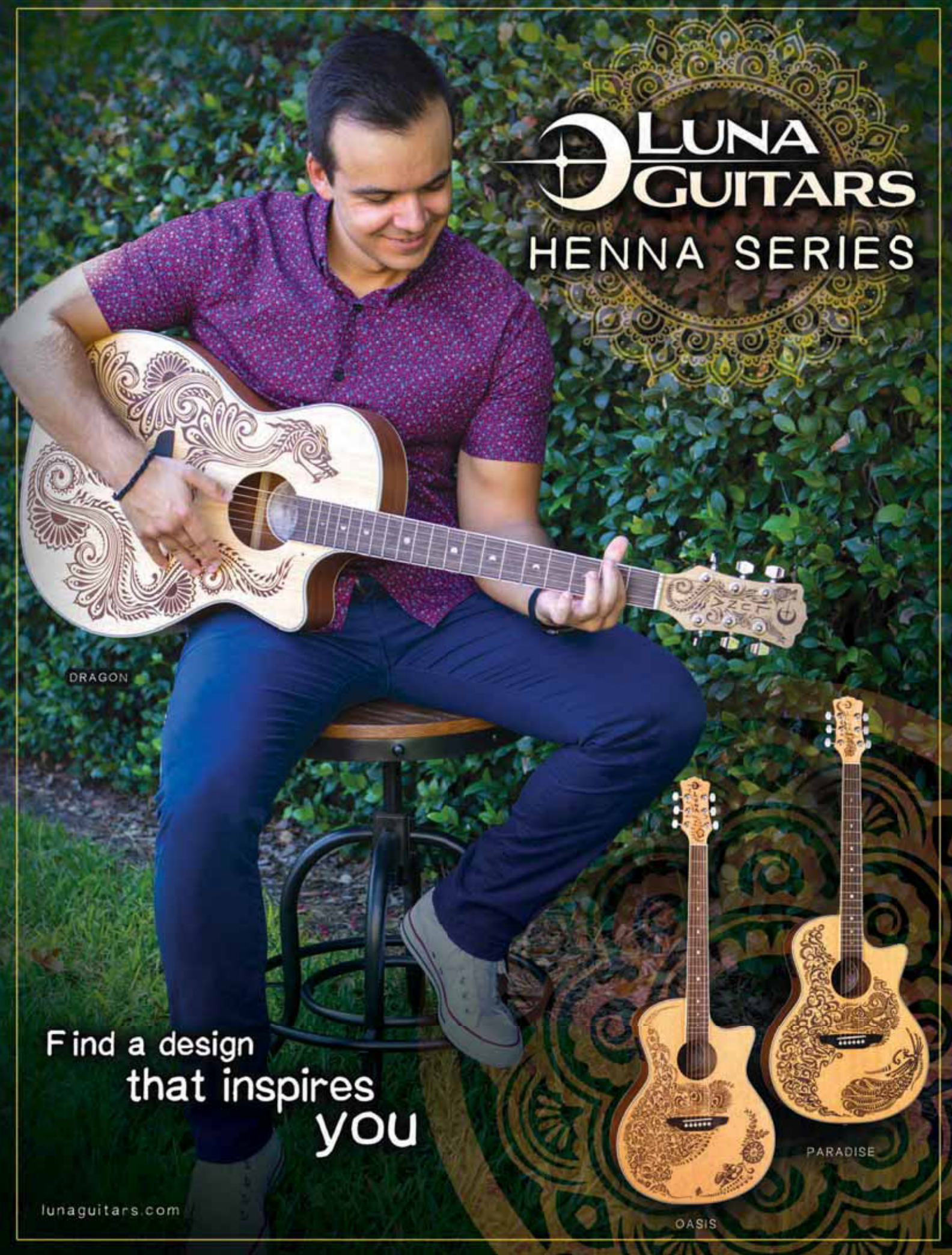
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JULIE SKARRATT

Every Guitar Tells a Story

Jimmy Buffett and his surprising collection of golden-era instruments

BY JAMES ROTONDI

“I’ve been spending a lot of time catching up with all my guitars down here in Pandemic-ville,” quips Jimmy Buffett, relaxing at his home studio in Palm Beach, Florida. “Y’know, if you’re lucky enough to get to that point where you’re on the road and you’ve got a little money, in any town you pull into you’re looking at and probably buying guitars. The thing is, I buy them when I’m on the road, and then I send them back home. Now, since I probably only bring five or six of my real workhorses with me on the road, these other great guitars sort of sit at home. Well, suddenly I find myself with the time to really enjoy playing and caring for these great instruments. That’s been a silver lining in this whole damn thing.”

Buffett, of course, is the global musical avatar of sun-and-surf devotees everywhere, best known for composing modern island-infused standards like “Margaritaville,” “Come Monday,” and “Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes,” not to mention his expansive current resume as a successful restaurateur, best-selling author, Broadway auteur, devoted philanthropist, and beacon to his legions of fans who dub themselves Parrotheads. The man has done very well, as they say. But even with his multiple projects and pursuits, he remains as passionate a guitar aficionado, player, and collector as you’re likely to meet. These days he’s been focusing on developing his Brazilian jazz chord and lick vocabulary,

and, of course, hunkering down with his many rarified golden-era guitars.

BURIED TREASURE

Many of Buffett’s most cherished instruments found their way onto his latest album, *Songs You Don’t Know by Heart*, a fan-curated collection of his lesser-known songs rerecorded in solo or duo settings, many performed with his longtime writing partner, songwriter and producer Mac McAnally. His guitar choices for diamonds in the rough like “Woman Goin’ Crazy on Caroline Street” and “Death of an Unpopular Poet”—a remarkable song based on the tragic deaths of poet Kenneth Patchen and singer Richard Fariña—were equally delib-



erate, nods not only to each song's provenance, but also to the guitars' own histories, and the special demands of tracking live with guitar and voice at the same time.

A great example is Buffett's 1939 Gibson J-100. "Those are not delicate guitars!" laughs Buffett. "Those guitars were built to be played loud, to create a big sound in a room, so they're perfect for those times when you're recording yourself singing and playing at the same time. I used it on this new version of 'Woman Goin' Crazy on Caroline Street,' because the original version has that same kind of solo-act bigness to the guitar." Great-sounding guitar, for sure, but wait until you hear Buffett's story behind it.

"I was living in Aspen, Colorado, for the summer at that time," Buffett recounts, "and the only guy I knew who had a Gibson Everly Brothers Flattop model was my pal J.D. Souther. But man, I really wanted one of my own. I just loved the look and sound of that guitar. I was finally able to find a 1962 Everly Brothers through a guy at a shop in Florida. A little bit later, J.D. came to Aspen to play a show, and we had a party for him. When he got there, I said, 'C'mon over here, man, I want to show you something' I got out my 1962 Everly Brothers and started playing it, jamming with J.D., and it was going great. Then J.D. stops and says, 'Jimmy, I've got to talk to you for a minute. I didn't tell you this, but my Everly Brothers got stolen about two months ago. And you've been playing it for the last ten minutes!'"

"Well, I gave that guitar right back to J.D. on the spot," Buffett continues. "And I contacted the guy in Florida that sold it to me—he sold Moroccan rugs, guitars, and hash pipes, as I recall—and I said, 'I don't know where you got that guitar you sold me, but it was stolen, and it belonged to a friend of mine, so I gave it back to him. So, unless you want to see federal investigators coming down here, you'd better have something for me of equal value that I can trace the numbers on to make sure it's not stolen. And you'd better have it *quick*.' Sure enough, he showed up a few days later with that 1962 Gibson J-100."

Another high-flying guitar tale concerns Buffett's semi-legendary "Painted Lady," a 1969 Martin D-28 that he bought at George Gruhn's original GTR shop in downtown Nashville in the 1970s, and on which Gruhn and repair tech Randy Wood had done some additional inlay work, along the lines of a D-45. "That was my 'A' guitar," recalls Buffett. "Heck, I only had two guitars at the time—my D-18 12-string and my new D-28. Around that time I had begun

hanging out with writer Tom McGuane and landscape painter Russell Chatham. We were kind of running around in the mountains in those days doing some psychedelics. Well, we were hanging around the lake with these girls who kinda looked like mermaids, and I said, 'Russell, why don't you paint a mermaid on my guitar?'"

"Let's just say our thoughts had cleared a bit by the next day, and when Russell asked me if I still liked it, I said, 'Well, it kinda reminds me of the girl on the Herbal Essences shampoo bottle.' [Laughs.] I'd envisioned some Old World scrimshaw sort of thing! But y'know what? When I moved down to Key West full-time, that's the very guitar I wrote 'Margaritaville' on. It's just my most trusted guitar for nearly anything I want to play, and on the new album I played it on 'Love in the Library.'"

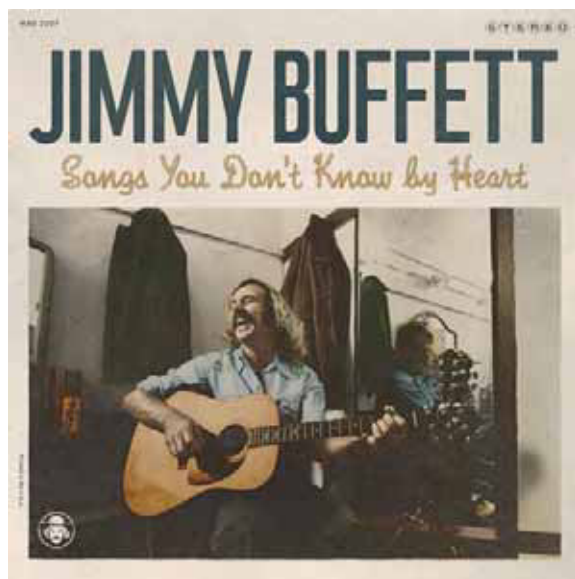
DON'T STOP THE CARNIVAL

Other gems from Buffett's evolving collection include a 1951 Martin D-18 that he picked up in Paris and immortalized on his song "Rue de la Guitare"; a ca. 1887 Martin 0-28 that he played on "Tonight I Just Need My Guitar"; a cutaway Benedetto Andy 3/4-scale

'I never really saw myself as being a guitar collector, but after going to visit Vince Gill and later working with Mark Knopfler, they really got me into it'

—JIMMY BUFFETT

archtop that he likes to play through a Henriksen combo amp; an "incredibly loud-sounding" 1949 Epiphone Emperor that was a birthday gift from McAnally; and newer Martins, including a clutch of his own signature D-18s, the LX Jimmy Buffett "Little Marlin" Special Edition, and a "sweet" 000-28 with a built-in L.R. Baggs pickup system and tuner that Buffett plans to use for



a series of socially distanced "boat shows" across the Southern U.S. coast in 2021.

Buffett extends his love of the instrument to the community. In addition to his long-standing work with the Singing for Change Foundation, he is working with Fender on a buyback program that would allow underserved youth to buy less expensive Fender guitars and eventually trade up, at very generous rates, to more premium instruments. He's also offering many of his private collection instruments for students' use at his alma mater, the University of Southern Mississippi ("Southern Miss"), based on a merit system where the prospective use of these fine guitars helps motivate students to elevate their academic performance.

"I never really saw myself as being a guitar collector," Buffett explains, "but after going to visit Vince Gill and later working with Mark Knopfler, they really got me into it. Not anywhere near their level, though. God almighty, Knopfler's got a lot of guitars!" In order to house all his own lovely instruments, Buffett built a private studio at his home in Sag Harbor, New York. "When it was all built and done and I was ready to take it all in," he recounts, "my property manager said, 'No, Jimmy, you can't go in yet. Just give me a little bit.'"

"When I did go in," Buffett recalls, "he'd put all of my dozens of guitars up on stands, all of them standing up in the house. Wow. I mean, just taking all of it in at that moment, I remembered exactly which guitars I'd written certain songs on and the feelings that drove those songs. It brought back exactly where and how I'd come by each of those guitars, and the incredible backstories behind them. It was truly overwhelming." **AC**

Bill Withers onstage
in Cannes, 1973





ACOUSTIC SOUL

INSIDE THE SONGS AND GUITAR STYLE OF BILL WITHERS

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Few artists have made such a deep imprint on the music world in such a short time as Bill Withers. He launched his music career relatively late—he was 32 when his debut album came out in 1971—and then walked away from it all within 15 years. And yet during that stretch of the '70s and early '80s, Withers delivered a string of classic songs, from “Ain’t No Sunshine” and “Grandma’s Hands” to “Lean on Me,” “Lovely Day,” and “Just the Two of Us,” that continue to reverberate today. Built on the earthy grooves of his acoustic guitar, Withers’ music drew on soul, blues, gospel, and country, but those genre distinctions seem irrelevant. With a rare gift for distilling an emotion or story down to its essence, Withers created songs that feel timeless and universal.

“He made such an enormous impact,” says Son Little, whose own take on guitar-based R&B has drawn frequent comparisons to Withers. “I don’t remember first hearing ‘Lean on Me.’ His songs have had such power and reach that they’re really a part of the culture. It’s true folk music.”

Withers passed away last March from heart complications at age 81, prompting a fresh look at his musical legacy. While he always put the spotlight on his vocals and lyrics, one of the special features of Withers’ music was his use of acoustic guitar—a rarity in the realm of soul/R&B, then and now. Withers himself was the first to

point out that he was far from a fancy instrumentalist. “I can’t play the guitar or the piano,” he once told the *New York Times*, “but I made a career out of writing songs on guitars and piano.” He developed a stripped-down accompaniment style that was the perfect vehicle for his songwriting, from gentle ballads to funk-ed-up blues.

“He, more than anybody else, employed the acoustic guitar in R&B music in a really special way,” Little says. “The songs break down easily into really simple patterns that you can play on an acoustic guitar. As with a lot of great music or art, its biggest strength is its simplicity.”

Withers recognized that quality in his own work. “If you research it, very few songs that live in the minds of people are written by virtuoso musicians,” he said in an interview with *American Songwriter*. “The things that they do are too complicated. There’s an almost inverse ratio between virtuosity and popularity. Simplicity is directly related to availability for most people.”

This lesson goes inside some of Withers’ best songs—especially from his first few albums, when his own guitar was most prominent—to reveal the understated accompaniment style that carries them.

WORKINGMAN’S BLUES

Growing up, Withers hardly seemed headed for a life in music. Born and raised in the coal company town of Slab

Fork, West Virginia, he did not play an instrument and, by his own account, had no special involvement with music as a child. Eager to escape working in the mines, as all the other men in his family had done, he joined the Navy at 17 and trained as an airline mechanic. Only in his late 20s, while working in an airline parts factory in California, did he pick up a pawnshop guitar and begin to write. Withers was still employed at the factory—installing toilets in 747s—when he was recording his debut album, as captured in the cover photo of Withers during a work break, lunch box in hand.

Signed to the Sussex label, Withers had the good fortune to be matched with producer Booker T. Jones, who chose to showcase Withers in his natural element on the aptly titled *Just As I Am*. Backed by Jones and his band, the MGs, with Stephen Stills subbing on guitar for Steve Cropper, Withers delivered an assured, soulful performance, with his acoustic guitar at the center of the mix.

The album's first single was the propulsive "Harlem," but the song that broke Withers' career wide open was its B side, "Ain't No Sunshine." Withers said the movie *The Days of Wine and Roses* inspired the lover's lament, which he set to a haunting melody over a minor blues progression. As it happened, Withers actually intended to write lyrics in place of the song's famous "I know" incantation, but Jones and the other session players convinced him to leave the ad lib in place.

Although "Ain't No Sunshine" is in A minor and could easily be played with open-position chord shapes, Withers rarely went that route on the guitar. Instead, he tended to reach for chord shapes up the neck, especially the types of three-note voicings often used in swing/jazz rhythm. So, in **Example 1**, grab the Am7 at the fifth fret. Play fingerstyle, picking the bass notes with your thumb and the upper notes with your index and middle fingers. Use open strings only on the Em7 in measures 1 and 7 (for that chord, you don't need to fret any strings at all). The movable three-note shapes used for Am7, G7, Em7 (in measure 5), and Dm7 recur throughout Withers' music and the following examples.

Withers revisited his West Virginia childhood in "Grandma's Hands," another gem from his debut. His father died young, and Withers was raised primarily by his mother and grandmother. He credits his grandmother in particular as his early champion. "I was one of those kids who was smaller than all the girls; I stuttered, I had asthma, so I had some issues," Withers recalled in an interview at the Grammy Museum in 2014. "My grandmother was that one person who would always say that I was going to be OK." In "Grandma's Hands," he paid tribute through a series of vignettes of his grandmother, from playing the tambourine in church to helping an unwed mother to picking up young Billy when he fell.



Like "Ain't No Sunshine," "Grandma's Hands" uses a simple progression in a minor key, in this case E minor. In **Example 2**, on the Em, pick the sixth, fourth, and third strings simultaneously, adding the second fret on the third string on beat two to create the song's main riff. For the B7 and A7, hold the same shape you used for the G7 in "Ain't No Sunshine."

SURPRISING PATTERNS

Withers' barebones approach on the guitar led him to some unusual places. One example is "I'm Her Daddy," a poignant track on *Just As I Am*, in which the narrator has discovered he has a six-year-old daughter. The song is in C#m, a key that few folk guitarists would tackle

Example 1 (à la "Ain't No Sunshine")

Am7 Em7 G7 Am7 Em7 G7 Am7

Em7 Dm7 Am7 Em7 G7 Am7



without a capo. But that's exactly what Withers did, thanks to the closed chord shapes he favored. In **Example 3**, you actually do use the open sixth string as part of the bass line leading into the C#m7 and F#7. On these two chords, let the C# bass note (string 5, fret 4) ring while you pick the upper notes.

In the song's main rhythm pattern, the C# bass note falls not on the 1 but at the end of the previous measure—Withers often anticipated the downbeat in this way. This pattern has a sneaky variation too, shown in measures 3 and 4. In measure 3, play the upper notes of the C#m7 for one extra eighth note—that is, pick

them six times rather than five, as before. This pushes the open string E to the last upbeat of the measure, so that the C# bass note then lands on the downbeat of measure 4.

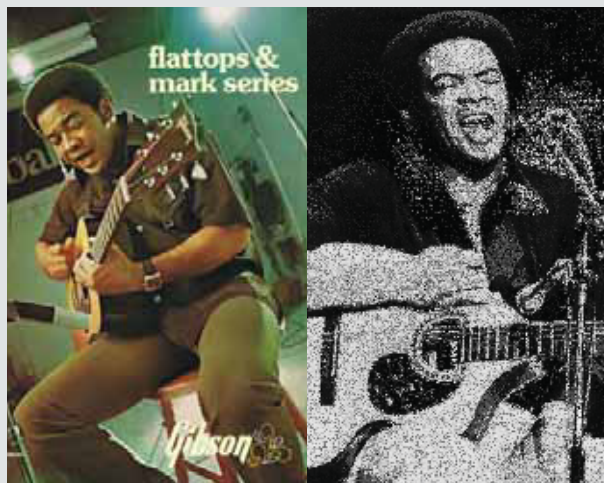
If you listen closely to Withers' performance of "I'm Her Daddy" on *Just As I Am*, or the live takes from the early '70s available on

Example 2 (à la "Grandma's Hands")

Example 2 is a guitar exercise in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of one sharp (F#). The exercise is divided into two systems. The first system starts with an Em chord and continues with B7 and Em chords. The second system continues with B7, A7, B7, A7, B7, A7, and ends with an Em chord. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 4/4 time signature. The bass line is indicated by a 'B' on a staff with fret numbers. The guitar part is indicated by a 'G' on a staff with fret numbers and a '4' indicating the fourth string.

Example 3 (à la "I'm Her Daddy")

Example 3 is a guitar exercise in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The exercise is divided into two systems. The first system starts with a C#m7 chord and continues with F# and C#m7 chords. The second system continues with G#7, F#7, C#m7, and F#7 chords. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps, and a 4/4 time signature. The bass line is indicated by a 'B' on a staff with fret numbers. The guitar part is indicated by a 'G' on a staff with fret numbers and a '4' indicating the fourth string.



BILL WITHERS' GUITARS

Dreadnoughts were a good match for Bill Withers' muscular rhythm style, and concert footage from the 1970s shows him playing a Martin D-35 and a Gibson J-50—he appeared in Gibson ads around that time. Guitarists watching the *Still Bill* documentary may notice the array of instruments with unusual teardrop-shaped bodies behind Withers in some interview segments. These are Craviola guitars, originally designed in the late '60s by guitarist/composer Paulinho Nogueira and built by the Brazilian company Giannini. Jimmy Page famously played a 12-string Craviola in the early '70s on Led Zeppelin's "Tangerine." Giannini still builds a Craviola line that includes steel- and nylon-string acoustics, electrics, and basses. —JPR

YouTube, you'll hear him switch back and forth between these two variations throughout the song. In effect he is shifting by a half beat where the chord change falls—a cool detail that keeps the progression feeling slightly off balance. As you practice the example, keep time with your feet so you can feel the change and the syncopation.

Also on his debut, the lonesome ballad "Hope She'll Be Happier" is built around the pattern in **Example 4**, played in the key of D using a fingering high up the neck. Fret the fifth string at the 12th fret for an A note above the root on the open fourth string; in measure 2, raise the fifth string to an A# for a Daug. Withers repeats this pattern for a long stretch before finally switching to Gm7, as shown in measure 5. The whole accompaniment part is as sparse as it could be, leaving nothing to distract from the emotion of Withers' vocal and story.

IN THE GROOVE

By late 1971, Withers' debut album vaulted him from the factory floor to the stage of *The Tonight Show*, as "Ain't No Sunshine" and "Grandma's Hands" rose on the charts. For performing, he found the perfect collaborators in the Los Angeles-based Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band, who locked right into his less-is-more style. The antithesis of the showbiz front man, Withers held the stage with the band like a coffeehouse singer, seated with his flattop guitar even while laying down grooves that make it nearly impossible to stay off your feet.

The band was so tight that Withers managed to convince his label boss, Clarence Avant (profiled in the recent Netflix documentary *The Black Godfather*), to let him and the musicians self-produce his second studio album. That unusual freedom certainly paid off with 1972's *Still Bill*, chock-full of great songs and performances.

Two tracks on *Still Bill*, both based on two-chord vamps, serve as a good intro to how Withers played in a funk context. "Use Me," a hit on both the Hot 100 and soul charts, simply toggles between Em7 and A7, using the same minor seventh and dominant seventh shapes as "Ain't No Sunshine."

For **Example 5a**, grab a flatpick and get ready for a picking-arm workout—alternating down and up strums on every eighth note. On some

Example 4 (à la "Hope She'll Be Happier")

Example 4 is a guitar accompaniment pattern in the key of D major, featuring a mix of standard and Craviola guitar techniques. The pattern is divided into two systems, each with a treble and bass staff.

System 1:

- Measure 1:** Chord D. Treble staff: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter). Bass staff: A1 (quarter), B1 (quarter), C2 (quarter), D2 (quarter).
- Measure 2:** Chord D^{aug}. Treble staff: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter). Bass staff: A1 (quarter), B1 (quarter), C2 (quarter), D2 (quarter).
- Measure 3:** Chord D. Treble staff: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter). Bass staff: A1 (quarter), B1 (quarter), C2 (quarter), D2 (quarter).
- Measure 4:** Chord D. Treble staff: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter). Bass staff: A1 (quarter), B1 (quarter), C2 (quarter), D2 (quarter).

System 2:

- Measure 5:** Chord Gm7. Treble staff: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). Bass staff: D2 (quarter), E2 (quarter), F2 (quarter), G2 (quarter).
- Measure 6:** Chord D. Treble staff: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter). Bass staff: A1 (quarter), B1 (quarter), C2 (quarter), D2 (quarter).
- Measure 7:** Chord D. Treble staff: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter). Bass staff: A1 (quarter), B1 (quarter), C2 (quarter), D2 (quarter).
- Measure 8:** Chord D. Treble staff: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter). Bass staff: A1 (quarter), B1 (quarter), C2 (quarter), D2 (quarter).



beats, marked with X noteheads, relax your fretting fingers to get a percussive scratch instead of a chord. Even when you don't play, as on beat one of measure 4, keep the strum movement going—just bypass the strings. Hitting some open strings, as at the ends of measures 2 and 4,

gives you a moment to change positions while maintaining the rhythm. In a passage like measure 4, which has mostly scratches, the guitar is essentially playing the role of maracas. To push the groove a little harder, emphasize the backbeats (2 and 4).

That insistent strum isn't designed to stand on its own, of course. Withers' groove-based songs have signature riffs overlaid as well. In "Use Me," Ray Jackson played a super funky repeating riff on clavinet; **Example 5b** shows a guitar adaptation. As with everything in Withers'

Example 5a (à la "Use Me")

Example 5a is a musical notation for a guitar piece in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piece is divided into two measures, each with a chord change. The first measure is in E minor 7 (Em7) and the second measure is in A major 7 (A7). The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the bass line is written on a single staff. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some notes marked with 'X' to indicate a percussive scratch. The bass line consists of quarter and eighth notes, with some notes marked with 'X' to indicate a percussive scratch. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Example 5b

Example 5b is a musical notation for a guitar piece in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piece is divided into two measures, each with a chord change. The first measure is in E minor 7 (Em7) and the second measure is in A major 7 (A7). The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the bass line is written on a single staff. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some notes marked with 'X' to indicate a percussive scratch. The bass line consists of quarter and eighth notes, with some notes marked with 'X' to indicate a percussive scratch. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Example 6a (à la "Lonely Town, Lonely Street")

Example 6a is a musical notation for a guitar piece in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piece is divided into two measures, each with a chord change. The first measure is in B minor 7 (Bm7) and the second measure is in F# minor 7 (F#m7). The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the bass line is written on a single staff. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some notes marked with 'X' to indicate a percussive scratch. The bass line consists of quarter and eighth notes, with some notes marked with 'X' to indicate a percussive scratch. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Example 6b

Example 6b is a musical notation for a guitar piece in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piece is divided into two measures, each with a chord change. The first measure is in B minor 7 (Bm7) and the second measure is in F# minor 7 (F#m7). The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the bass line is written on a single staff. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some notes marked with 'X' to indicate a percussive scratch. The bass line consists of quarter and eighth notes, with some notes marked with 'X' to indicate a percussive scratch. The piece ends with a double bar line.

BILL WITHERS

music, the riff makes its mark while leaving lots of space. Avoid the temptation to noodle.

The same instrumental dynamic holds in the opening track of *Still Bill*, “Lonely Town, Lonely Street.” In **Example 6a**, again strum two chords, Bm7 and F#m7, using the same three-note shape; maintain a down-up motion throughout, and mix chords with percussive scratches. Bear in mind that this is a loose, improvisational style, so the pattern shown is just one example—feel free to go with the flow and make your own variations. **Example 6b** then shows an accompanying riff, similar to what’s played on the track on electric guitar (Benorce Blackmon) and bass (Melvin Dunlap).

BEYOND THREE CHORDS

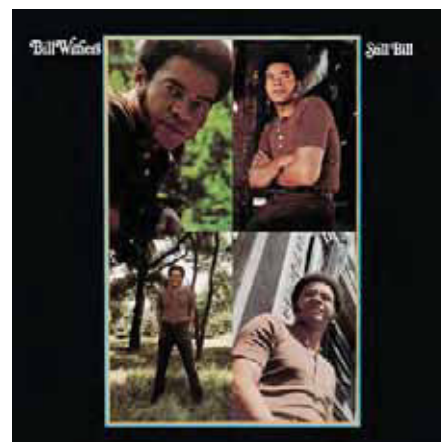
As the above examples demonstrate, Withers got an awful lot of songwriting mileage out of two- and three-chord progressions with just a few repeating chord shapes. But some of his songs use more complex progressions, especially collaborations such as the bossa nova-tinted “Hello Like Before” (written with John E. Collins and recorded with veteran session player Dennis Budimir on nylon-string guitar), “Lovely Day” (written with Skip Scarborough; see Acoustic Classic on page 56), and “Just the Two of Us” (written with William Salter and Ralph MacDonald, and first recorded by saxophonist Grover Washington Jr. with Withers as

the featured singer). One early example of a song with more harmonic complexity, written by Withers alone and featuring his own guitar work, is the ballad “Let Me in Your Life” from *Still Bill*.

Example 7 is based on the introduction and part of the verse of “Let Me in Your Life,” and opens with an F#m7b5 to F#dim7 to Emaj7 progression that recurs later in the song. Play with your fingers, and for the repeating chords shown with a rhythm slash (as in measures 1, 5–7, etc.), strum with your thumb for a soft sound. Play the Emaj7 at the seventh fret, and in measures 4, 8, and 12, slide the shape up a fret for an Fmaj7 and then back down.

ON THE KEYS

In addition to his guitar-based music, Withers wrote plenty of songs on piano, and his later albums feature a much more keyboard-oriented, smooth R&B/pop sound. He wrote his most iconic song, “Lean on Me,” on a Wurlitzer keyboard, following the simplest of patterns: starting on C, walking up the white keys (the major scale) to F, and walking back down. That line, harmonized, is the foundation of Withers’ piano accompaniment and his melody. With its warm gospel sound and reassuring message of friendship, “Lean on Me” is a truly universal song, more resonant than ever during the social isolation of the pandemic.



To wrap up this tour of Withers’ music, **Example 8** shows a guitar rendition of the simple idea immortalized in “Lean on Me.” Play three- and four-note chords throughout, picking the individual strings with your fingers simultaneously for a sound closer to piano, as opposed to strumming. For the three-note chords, pick with your thumb, index, and middle fingers; for the four-note chords, employ your ring finger too. (Alternatively, you could pick all the three-note chords with your index, middle, and ring fingers, and bring in the thumb only for the four-note chords.) Note the fingering suggestions in measure 4, which will help you navigate the

Example 7 (à la “Let Me in Your Life”)

Example 7 is a guitar score for the introduction and part of the verse of “Let Me in Your Life.” The score is written for guitar and includes chord diagrams and fingering suggestions.

The score is divided into two systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4.

System 1:

- Measures 1–4: F#m7b5, F#dim7, Emaj7, Fmaj7 Emaj7.
- Measures 5–7: Repeating chords with a rhythm slash.
- Measures 8–12: Sliding the Emaj7 shape up a fret to Fmaj7 and back down.

System 2:

- Measures 13–16: Fmaj7, Emaj7.
- Measures 17–20: Repeating chords with a rhythm slash.

The score includes detailed fingering suggestions for the left hand, including fingerings for the thumb, index, middle, ring, and pinky fingers. The right hand is indicated by a slash, suggesting a strummed or picked sound.



G6 to G9 and set you up for the return to C in the next measure.

THE RIGHT INTENT

It's remarkable that an artist with Withers' natural talents and popularity would opt out of a music career so early, releasing no new albums after 1985 and contributing to only a handful of songs recorded by other artists, such as "Simply Complicated" with Jimmy Buffett (2004) and "Mi Amigo Cubano" with Raul Midón (2014). Withers was more available to the public in recent years, especially through the 2009 documentary *Still Bill*—a must-watch for anyone interested in learning more about the man behind the music—and his induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2015. Deeply cynical about the music

business and determined not to play what he termed the "fame game," Withers seemed very much at peace out of the spotlight.

An immersion in Withers' music brings powerful lessons for any guitar-playing songwriter, especially about the value of directness. As a lyricist, he never got bogged down in cleverness or complicated metaphors. "Ain't no sunshine when she's gone." "Lean on me when you're not strong." Withers' words say what they mean and go straight to the emotional heart.

For Son Little, Withers' songs are a reminder that the guitar should not draw too much attention to itself. "If I'm thinking about your guitar playing, then you either messed up or you're playing too much," he says. "It's a hard lesson to learn—to trust the song, trust your voice. I'm still working on it."

Another musician I spoke with about Withers, Louisiana singer-songwriter and guitarist Marc Broussard, describes a similar revelation about his own approach to the instrument. "For a long time I felt it was necessary to get as technical and as clever as possible. I wanted the average listener to feel like it was just another song, but I wanted musicians to say, 'Oh, man, did you hear that modulation?' or 'Did you hear them go to that flat-five right there?' That was just a bunch of ego stroking.

"Then I started digging into Bill's stuff and realized that if you have the right intent, none of that is necessary. Two chords, three chords at the most sometimes; you just put the right melody and lyrics together, and everything else is just going to work itself out." **AC**

Example 8 (à la "Lean on Me")

A PERSONAL TOUCH

Irina Kulikova explores her formative influences as a child prodigy in Russia

BY MARK SMALL

Irina Kulikova's life story is an inspiring tale of how natural talent, hard work, and family support combined to launch her as an internationally renowned classical guitar virtuoso. Her latest album, *It's About the Touch*, is the 38-year-old guitarist's most personal musical statement to date, featuring selections that shaped her musical personality as a child in Russia.

Kulikova's previous albums have waded into substantial repertoire, presenting distinctive takes on J.S. Bach's "Cello Suite No. 1" and large-scale sonatas by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Antonio José, Manuel Ponce, and others. Her 2014 album, *Reminiscences of Russia*, contains atmospheric works by countrymen Konstantin Vassiliev, Sergey Rudnev, and Victor Kozlov.

It's About the Touch takes a different tack. With the support of a crowdfunding campaign, it was released on Kulikova's newly launched production company, which also publishes her transcriptions. The album features chestnuts like Frédéric Chopin's "Vals No. 7," Erik Satie's "Gnossienne No. 1," Claude Debussy's "Clair de Lune," Agustín Barrios' "La Catedral," and four classics by Francisco Tárrega. Also included is a guitar setting by Vassiliev of "Mariëlle (Be as Beautiful as You)," a lullaby Kulikova's husband, Wouter Fellendans, penned for their daughter. One of the guitarist's childhood friends, cellist Feliks Volozhanin, appears on five tracks, including Tomaso Albinoni's "Adagio," Franz Schubert's "Ave Maria," and Vassiliev's evocative "Three Night Ballades."

HER LIFE'S SOUNDTRACK

As befits the album's concept, the music showcases Kulikova's sensitive musicianship. She tenderly shapes and caresses each phrase on the predominantly introspective selections, but reveals her fiery virtuosity on Isaac Albéniz's "Asturias" and "La Catedral" (Barrios). The 77-minute program is, in essence, the soundtrack

to Kulikova's own childhood, and represents a personal milestone.

"As a child discovering music, I fell in love with music by Schubert, Albinoni, Chopin, Debussy, Abéniz, and Tárrega," Kulikova says in a FaceTime call from her home in the Netherlands. "It had an influence on my personality and how I wanted to be as a musician. After my daughter, Mariëlle, was born, I had to say no to some activities and not travel as much so I could be with her. I gave myself a goal that when she was eight years old I would record a CD with favorite pieces that influenced me when I was young."

Kulikova grew up in Chelyabinsk, a city close to the southern Ural mountains near the Russia-Kazakhstan border. (In 2013, Chelyabinsk

'The winters in Russia were long and cold, so what else could you do? Music was my best friend!'

—IRINA KULIKOVA

made headlines worldwide when a meteorite exploded miles above the city, shaking the ground and lighting up the February morning sky.) The guitarist's parents provided Kulikova and her younger brother a warm, nurturing environment despite the political and economic turmoil that surrounded them as the Soviet Union crumbled in the late 1980s.

"I was born into a very happy family," she says. "My mom is a cellist and taught at a music school—which was a very good-paying profession in the Soviet Union. After the end of the Soviet Union, it became the worst profession."

By the time she was five years old, Kulikova was taking piano and guitar lessons at the school where her mother taught. She was soon a guitar

prodigy studying with Victor Kozlov, a guitarist and composer teaching at the Chelyabinsk Music College. "He mostly taught adults; I was his first young student," she recalls. "With Victor, it was serious guitar instruction; he taught me guitar technique. My mother showed me a lot about cello technique and worked with me on musical phrasing and singing as I played. So I had two teachers."

A video posted on IrinaKulikova.com shows her at eight—already technically accomplished and poised—effortlessly playing Tárrega's gavotte "Maria" and more. Around this time, she began playing gigs to help support her family.

THRIVING THROUGH HARD TIMES

"It was a challenging time for my parents," she says. "I started playing concerts in military hospitals, prisons, and kindergartens when I was eight, and got paid with a box of food for my family. There was no food in the shops. My father was working in a factory, but didn't get any money. After three years, he received 12 vacuum cleaners for his salary. He and my brother sold them on the street to get money."

Some of the vacuum funds allowed an 11-year-old Kulikova and her mother to take the 48-hour train journey to Voronezh, Russia, for an international guitar competition. It was well worth it. "I won first prize," she says. "I only had a cheap guitar back then and [Spanish guitar virtuoso and composer] José María Gallardo Del Rey was on the jury. When I returned to Voronezh the next year for a concert [as the previous year's winner], he brought me a handmade guitar by Manuel Contreras. It was a very special gift from him." The Spaniard would become an advocate for the young Kulikova, who was becoming a child star in Russia.

A paucity of available recordings and scores in Russia presented challenges as she grew musically. "We had a few pieces published by a



YANA FELDMAN (ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA)

Moscow company, but there were a lot of mistakes in them. It was difficult to get the repertoire that people all over the world were playing. Sometimes my mother would spend the night hand-copying a borrowed score for me. My father took photos of others and developed them in the dark room. I feel like I'm 150 years old telling stories like this! Now you can just order them from Amazon.

"As a kid I practiced scales, arpeggios, and exercises for both hands a lot," she continues. "I would practice six to eight hours a day with no weekends or holidays off. The winters in Russia were long and cold, so what else could you do? Music was my best friend. When you practice, you go into this imaginary world and feel so rich, so happy, playing beautiful music. I used to practice with my mom, and we went to concerts. My family gave everything to my brother and me so we could be happy."

A teenaged Kulikova got invitations to perform across Europe and received a scholarship from her city for studies abroad. "José Maria Gallardo Del Rey had given me the guitar and some lessons and promoted me to others," she says. "I went to England where I met [guitarist, author, publisher] Maurice Summerfield and took master classes with David Russell and Sérgio Assad. When I was 14, Maurice sent me a lot of CDs; when I was 15, I went to England to play a solo concert. It was very special to meet so many great musicians at such a young age. The doors opened for me to a real guitar life."

Kulikova continued her education at the Gnessin Academy in Moscow and the Mozarteum University in Salzburg, Austria, and won top prizes at several prestigious international competitions. "I was very lucky to study in Austria with Marco Tamayo," she says. "He completed my technique and helped me become very efficient at practicing. I learned to do in two hours what I used to accomplish in six and to be relaxed and precise in my playing. We worked on the most difficult repertoire, like the sonatas by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Antonio José, as well as Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* and other concertos."

Kulikova says she has brought together the diversity of perspectives that shaped her as an artist into her own unique teaching method that she applies in master classes around the world and as a guest professor at various universities. "I approach the artist as a whole," she says. "First we focus on the quality of sound. But I am also passionate about helping students deal with stage fright by developing rock-solid technique." This year she will open an online academy bearing her motto in life and music: It's All About the Touch.

EXPANDING GUITAR'S REACH

Kulikova has had numerous solo guitar pieces composed for her and, because she enjoys playing with other instrumentalists and vocalists, is setting her sights on chamber music. "Classical guitar is blooming; we are reaching a golden age," she says. "I see this all over the world—in Russia, China, Europe, and the United States. We need to now persuade classical guitar societies to do more concerts with guitar and other instruments, to be more like other music societies. I don't see guitarists playing for chamber societies. They have bigger halls and larger crowds. We are too separate from that world. I would love to see the guitar enter the chamber societies, playing with violinists, cellists, and other instruments. A lot of my friends play in string quartets or as solo violinists and cellists, and they love playing with guitar."

The cello is particularly special to Kulikova, as shown by her ongoing work with Feliks Volozhanin. "My mother is a cellist and Feliks is a cellist I've known since I was eight years old," she says. "We lived on the same street, attended the same music school, and our birthdays are five days apart. It's amazing to play with someone like that. I know his phrasing and never have to look to know when he is going to



start." He was a natural choice for this very personal album. Kulikova asked Vassiliev to write something for them with both instruments having equal parts, and "Three Night Ballades" is exactly what she was looking for.

Kulikova feels she is reaching her full potential as a mother, musician, and teacher. "I love to balance everything so everyone is happy, there is good energy, and quality time," she says. "You need to be well organized to manage everything. I am extremely happy to have all these things in my life." **AG**



YANA FELDMAN (ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA)

WHAT SHE PLAYS

Irina Kulikova plays Simon Marty guitars—a 2007 cedar top and a 2019 spruce top. She endorses Savarez strings and uses the company's Cantiga Premium, Creation, and Alliance sets.

GOOD TO GO

WHEN **EVER** • WHERE **VER**

A passion for playing means that inspiration can strike anytime, anywhere. With Elixir® Strings you know that when you pick up your guitar it's going to sound great—time and time again. That's because our featherweight coating protects your strings from the elements, keeping corrosion away and allowing your tone to sound great for longer, in any environment.

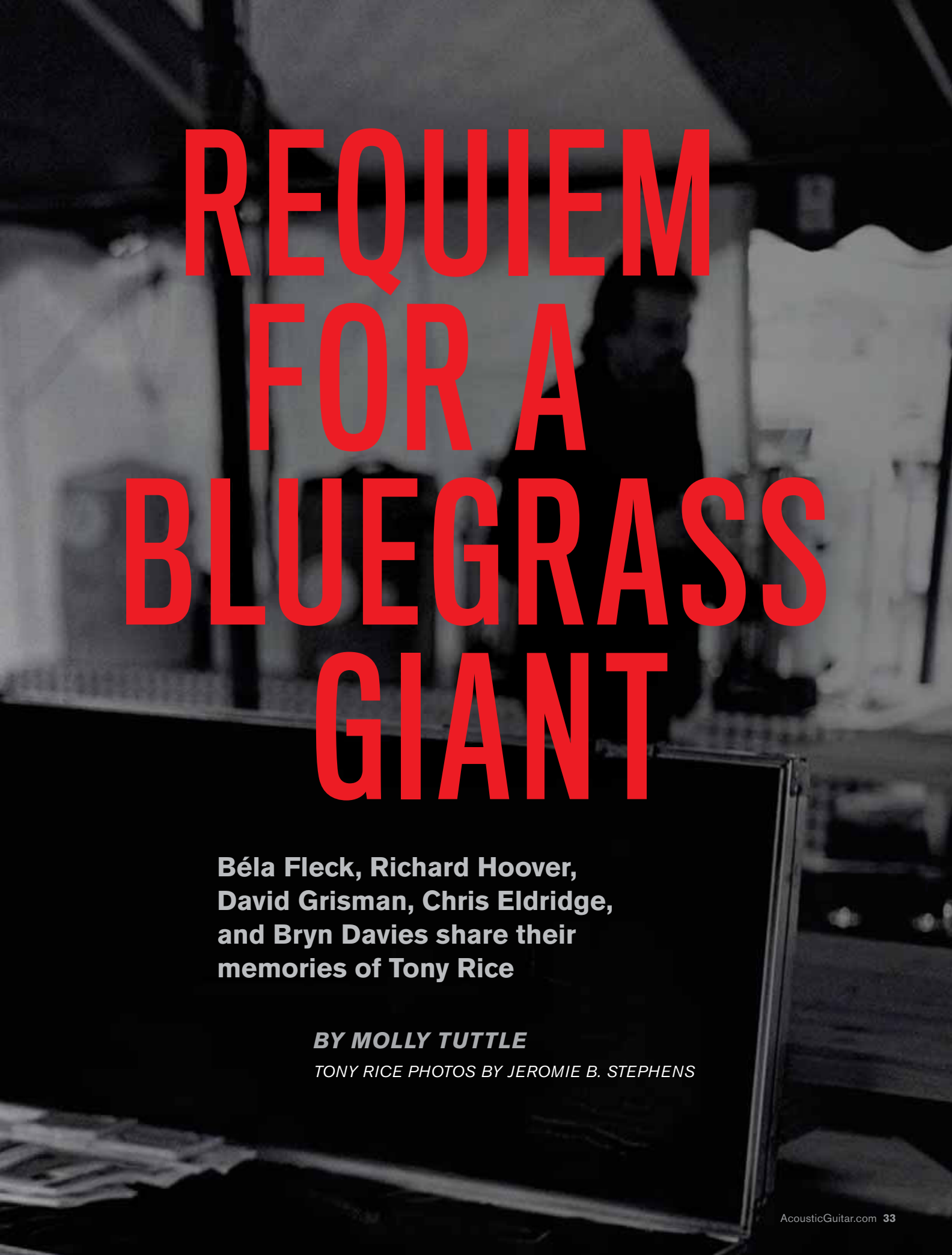
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**Tony Rice signs an autograph
in Gettysburg, PA, 1999.**



REQUIEM FOR A BLUEGRASS GIANT

**Béla Fleck, Richard Hoover,
David Grisman, Chris Eldridge,
and Bryn Davies share their
memories of Tony Rice**

BY MOLLY TUTTLE

TONY RICE PHOTOS BY JEROMIE B. STEPHENS

Wyatt Rice, Tony Rice, and Rickie Simpkins in Gettysburg, PA, 1994, before Tony took the stage and sang for the last time.



JEROMIE B STEPHENS

When I was a kid in the mid-2000s, my dad, Jack Tuttle, took me to Hardly Strictly Bluegrass in San Francisco to see my guitar hero. We got there hours early on a foggy day and wove our way through the massive crowd that gathered yearly for the free music festival. We squeezed onto a friend's picnic blanket by the front of the stage just in time to see a tall man in an elegant black suit walking out holding a dreadnought.

A hush came over the crowd waiting for Tony Rice to strum his first chord. As we watched him through the fog, the thing that struck me the most was the crystal-clear tone he got out of his guitar. He stood completely still on stage and had a mysterious presence that drew me in and had me hanging on every note he played. The mystery of Rice has stuck with me after all these years. I've spent hours learning his licks and solos note for note, but have never been able to replicate the sparkling tone that I heard that day in Golden Gate Park.

Having never met Rice, I've often wondered about the person who inspired me and so many others to pursue the guitar. I was holding out hope that he would perform again in his lifetime after years without a public appearance, and that

I'd get to meet him someday. Hearing the news that Rice passed away on Christmas Day at the age of 69 was heartwrenching for those of us whose lives were forever changed by his music.

Rice first came to prominence with the bluegrass band J.D. Crowe & the New South in the early 1970s. Throughout his four-decade career, he redefined bluegrass guitar playing and left a lasting imprint on the genre. He was a perfectionist who meticulously crafted a style that was all his own, but at times preferred spontaneity to rehearsals and soundchecks. Above all, he was someone who had a deep love for music and understood the importance of sharing beauty with the world.

Rice was also an incredible singer, celebrated for the warmth and clarity of his split-tenor voice. But for the last 25 years of his life, he was unable to sing, due to muscle-tension dysphonia—a disorder that contracts the muscles around the vocal cords—and his speaking voice became strained as well. Rice also gradually developed arthritis in both hands, which made it at first difficult and then impossible to achieve his legendary tone, speed, and accuracy. The last time he played guitar in public was at his 2013 induction to the International Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame.

It was a privilege to talk with five of Rice's friends and collaborators about his music, life, and legacy: Béla Fleck, who hired Rice to play guitar on some of his groundbreaking solo records; mandolin legend David Grisman, who worked closely with Rice for years to create a new style dubbed "dawg music"; Richard Hoover of Santa Cruz Guitar Company, who made the Tony Rice signature model guitar and developed a deep, lifelong friendship with him; Chris "Citter" Eldridge of Punch Brothers, who studied under Rice and gained philosophical and musical insight from his mentor and hero; and bass phenom Bryn Davies, who toured with Rice in the later part of his career.

Throughout these five conversations you'll hear Rice described as a friend, mentor, collaborator, bandleader, hero, and musical icon. Each interview offers a different perspective, but they all paint a picture of a man who could leave a powerful impression with just a few words, who could be intensely private yet had a rare ability to share a deep part of his spirit through music. Whether you are just discovering Rice's music or have loved it for years, I hope you enjoy these stories and reflections on his life and legacy.



Béla Fleck

"At the center of so much great music"

What kind of impression did Tony Rice make when you first encountered him?

Well, he was a big presence, so everybody in the bluegrass world was pretty excited about Tony when I came on the scene. The top cats were in the New South when he was in the band. And that was the big thing that was going on in bluegrass when I was coming up. Tony was at the center of so much great music. And then he got into the Grisman Quintet and they showed a way that you could actually make an impact outside of the bluegrass world as well with these [traditional bluegrass] instruments and with that kind of ability.

It was another great example of just being part of great music. I think that's the thing about Tony that's impacted my own call as a musician. It's not just about what you can do to show off your stuff or your tunes—you have to find a way to be a part of great music. And Tony would do that over and over again. Anything he touched would improve and gain a certain validity. It would solidify into a more powerful version of what it was trying to be if he got involved.

So anytime Tony did anything with me he would lend that to my music, and it was addictive because you could play better when he was around. And it was scary, because you weren't going to do a lot of takes and you really wanted to impress him. He wasn't sitting around being dark on people or anything. He was always very positive, but you still knew who he was and what he brought. It was intimidating, but that also brought out your best.

What was Tony's process like in the studio? I've heard that he wasn't super into rehearsing beforehand.

He preferred to just fly and roll and go. And I think maybe earlier in his career, he was more into working out the fiddle tunes note by note. Because nobody could do that with the authority that he could, and the sound and the tone and all that stuff. He wasn't really into doing that for a session, but he brought the magic.

The thing is, he would do a bunch of stuff that you didn't ask him to do. [Mandolinist] Sam Bush would be always like, "Hey Tony, you're not supposed to play there. Your solo is later." And I'd be like, "Sam, don't say that. That was so cool. He just came in out of nowhere and added this whole other thing underneath someone else's thing." Something would just come over Tony. And so when I was

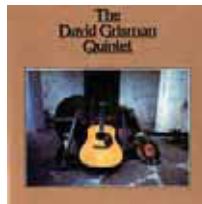
ESSENTIAL LISTENING



J. D. CROWE & THE NEW SOUTH

Self-titled (1975)

On these early recordings, Rice established himself as one of the most influential bluegrass singers and guitar players.



THE DAVID GRISMAN QUINTET

Self-titled (1977)

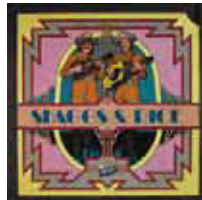
Rice was an integral part of the groundbreaking David Grisman Quintet that created a new style of acoustic music, taking influences from bluegrass, jazz, and folk.



THE TONY RICE UNIT

Manzanita (1978)

This album features Rice's signature instrumental "Manzanita" and some of his most beloved vocal pieces, like "Old Train," "Ginseng Sullivan," and "Blue Railroad Train."



RICKY SKAGGS/TONY RICE

Skaggs & Rice (1980)

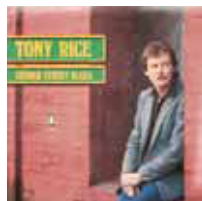
When I hear Rice and Skaggs singing together it give me chills! I love the way their voices blend on bluegrass classics like "There's More Pretty Girls Than One" and "Bury Me Beneath the Weeping Willow."



THE BLUEGRASS ALBUM BAND

The Bluegrass Album (1981)

This album is a must hear for anyone who loves bluegrass. It features an all-star band with Rice's mind-blowing guitar playing and vocals.



TONY RICE

Church Street Blues (1983)

This may be my favorite Rice album! It's just him and a guitar with no backing band and you can hear all the subtleties in his voice and guitar.



BÉLA FLECK

Drive (1988)

This iconic instrumental album features Fleck's masterful compositions and stunning guitar work by Rice.

—MT

editing the stuff together, I would always look for the places where he did something. It was fun being the guy to choose the takes and parts of takes and finding the magic—and using those parts, because Tony was very spontaneous.

He was never very self-critical in the studio, and he never wanted to do anything again, but now I'm glad I pushed him, as I think we got better stuff because of it. I asked him to overdub solos at times, and he would do one and the guitar would go back into case. He'd slam the case shut and lock it. I'd come back out and say, "Tony, would you mind doing just one more?" And then he'd go, "Yeah, Béla." And he would open up the case and slowly pull it out, put the guitar back on, and say, "OK, go."

Describe Tony's rhythm playing and the effect it had on you as a band mate.

Tony had this magical quality, even when he was singing and would just hit a little strum in between [vocal phrases], like on "Home From the Forest." That was the thing you waited for, just to hear that little punctuation from this guitar; it was so powerful. Tony was at center of it. He could just control a band like nobody's business.

In an interview in *Still Inside: The Tony Rice Story*, you talked about recording *Cold on the Shoulder* and how everything just locked in. What was that like?

I remember that feeling. I was listening to Tony like a hawk, and I don't know if he was listening to me or just doing his thing. But it was so easy to lock into his guitar part and play the banjo rolls. I felt like we turned into one person.

And that session was really profound for me because I had never felt like that. That was my first real session with Tony and Sam [Bush] together. To me, the Tony-and-Sam combo was just... Tony had this magic X factor, and Sam locked it down in such a beautiful way. Tony was certainly the more spontaneous musician, but leaning against Sam put Tony's stuff into stark relief. It was very, very special.



Richard Hoover
Building a different tool

What was your impression when you first heard Tony Rice play guitar in the late '70s?

Tony was really respectful and aloof at the same time, and he struck me as being a Southern gentleman, even though it turns out he started out as a Southern California boy. He had a presence about him of somebody that was important, and I don't mean that as self-important. He struck me as like, "Oh, I need to get to know

more about this guy, because maybe there's more to him than I realize."

Then of course, I was immediately impressed with hearing him play. And Tony's hands spoke of decades. He was born within two weeks of me, so he was like 25 at that time. But his hands showed literally decades of guitar playing; his fingertips were kind of mushroomed, his nails were receded, and you could tell he played guitar all day, every day, for years and years. What really struck me was the fluidity and naturalness of his playing; Tony wasn't at all mechanical. His phrasing was impressive, but his movement on the guitar spoke of being one with the instrument. I was thinking, "This guy's going to go someplace."

You then worked on a signature guitar with Tony. What was that process like?

Tony had an old Martin. That's such an iconic instrument that I probably wouldn't even work on it today. But back then it was a really worked

**'T WAS A GENTLE,
SWEET SOUL WHO
FUNNELED MOST
OF HIS INTELLECTUAL,
EMOTIONAL, AND SPIRITUAL
PURSUITS INTO
THE MUSIC HE PLAYED.'**

—DAVID GRISMAN

old Martin guitar. It was pretty filthy. It had a lot of cigarette ashes in the interior of it, it was kind of stinky, and it'd been modified considerably. And Tony explained that his old Martin had an awesome presence in the Grisman Quintet, but he had to play really close to the bridge to bring out the tone, clarity, and presence of the lead lines that he wanted. That was actually a shortcoming for him.

Also, Tony's Martin had belonged to Clarence White, and he venerated it. Clarence was his idol. And Tony really worried about it going on the road, because it was old and fragile. So he was looking for a guitar that would have additional features that would make it more contemporary for him, a different tool in his toolbox. With that explanation, we proceeded to make him the first prototype.

We built Tony a dreadnought that was more balanced, like an OM, and that meant that it had a nice bass presence, but it wasn't boomy

like old prewar dreadnoughts can be. We altered the bracing pattern, did some other variations, and presented him with a guitar that we thought was perfect for what he wanted. He came down and played it, and we took a million pictures, which are lost to history.

And it's funny, he said, "You know, man, I got a cold and I really can't hear this the way I'd like, so I'll take it home and I'll get back to you." He gave us a call a little later and said, "You know what? It's not . . . well, why don't you come on up and I'll show you." So we went to his house and sat and listened to him play and he explained that it had the clarity he was after, but it didn't have the warmth and the depth of what he was used to in his old dreadnought, and would we give it another shot. We changed the tone of it by using a cedar top, which gave a warmer, older sound right away, and we boosted the bass a little bit. And that one was a hit.

How would you describe your relationship with Tony?

Tony and I both had a lot of similar experiences growing up, and we had a lot of the same challenges as adults. And that commonality was the basis of our friendship—not music, not guitar playing, just the common journey and overcoming challenges.

I won't go into anecdotal detail, but I'll tell you that a lot of our friendship dealt with relationship challenges, spirituality, trying to get right with a higher power, and translating that into your dealings with other people. And for Tony, his relationships directly with people were difficult, because he had a celebrity facade and it became more and more who he was over time. It was difficult for him to let his guard down in that regard.

That's one of the things that I enjoy in my perspective, because I could just be a regular friend and not somebody that he had to impress or worry about me saying something. So that's why I'm still so guarded today about Tony, because he trusted me all along that we were just talking to each other and not the public.

You wrote [for *Bluegrass Today*], "It hadn't crossed his mind that someone might love him without his guitar." Talk about how Tony coped with the loss of his voice and his guitar chops. I feel like that goes into a broader topic of self-worth and mental health for musicians.

His voice was incredible, as you know, but losing his voice was not the heartbreak it would've been if he didn't have the guitar chops, which he maintained for many years. For a while he could sing or talk for a bit and his voice would cramp up, and it got worse and worse. So here's a guy



MASTERLY PICKING A Sampling of Tony Rice's Lead and Rhythm Work

I've been going back to some of my favorite Tony Rice recordings and reflecting on his life and all the guitar players that he inspired with his distinctive style of playing. **Example 1** shows a solo that he kicks off and ends "Old Train" with. It doesn't follow the melody of the song, but it clearly outlines the chord progression and is almost its own part of the song, which I love. If you're a Tony Rice fan, you hear three notes of this solo and you know it's "Old Train."

In addition to being one of the most influential lead guitar players, Rice was such an incredible rhythm guitarist. People who

have worked with him often mention how he locked everyone together with his rhythm playing. I love listening to "Bury Me Beneath the Willow," a duet Rice did with Ricky Skaggs, because you can hear the guitar so clearly. When Skaggs is singing, Rice is often just playing heavy bass notes and leaving space for the mandolin chop to be heard (**Example 2**). In spots you can hear a three-finger G chord, with the open B string, that goes so nicely with the song. So if you play bluegrass, you don't always have to play that four-finger G chord. —MT

Example 1 Capo III

Example 2 Capo V



JEROMIE B STEPHENS

that probably had a little bit of a nervousness about speaking to people in a social and relationship context and now is handicapped by not being able to talk very well.

That I think was the beginning of him isolating a bit and staying out of situations where he would be called upon to have one-on-one conversations or that kind of thing. The guitar stuff of course doesn't happen overnight—it happened a bit at a time—and that was the anguishing thing for him. When we first started to discuss this, it wasn't something he wanted anybody to have a hint of, that he was having difficulty with stamina, with speed and accuracy. He said, "My fans deserve my best, and if I can't give them my best I'm not going to do it." And watching that happen by degrees was hard.

Do you have any later memories of Tony or anything else you'd like to share?

I'm just going to close with my gratitude toward the relationship. A lot of people found it difficult to be friends with Tony. Also, people thought he was stuck-up, egotistical, but that's an assumption. It wasn't based on his actions as much as his inaction, the fact that he did not engage with people warmly. He was afraid.

Our defenses sometimes make it seem like we are buttheads when we're just trying to protect ourselves from hurt.



David Grisman

"A complete musician of the highest caliber"

You played with both Tony Rice and Clarence White.

Could you describe some

of the differences and similarities between the two players?

Clarence had a very unique approach to time in both his lead and rhythm playing. We spent hours jamming in my apartment after playing every night at the Gaslight Cafe in Greenwich Village during a weeklong engagement in 1964 with the Kentucky Colonels that I was lucky enough to have been hired for. When he died I thought I'd never hear that again. When I first played with Tony, sitting on a living room floor in Washington, D.C., having just met him on [banjoist] Bill Keith's project, my first thought was Clarence is back! I really hadn't heard Tony until that moment, but it was lifechanging for sure. He had a very similar approach but a more

powerful sound. In some ways I'd say that Tony took up where Clarence left off.

What was Tony like as a collaborator when you were crafting the sound for *The David Grisman Quintet* album?

I was already working on arranging my tunes with Todd Phillips on mandolin; violinist Darol Anger; and Joe Carroll, the bassist who played in the Great American Music Band, which I had formed with Richard Greene—a guitarless quartet. When Tony arrived to play with us for a few days before leaving for Japan with J.D. Crowe's group, he instantly completed the sound, and in a *huge* way! These guys were all enthusiastically willing participants in this acoustic musical experiment, and I am forever thankful to all of them for helping me realize this vision. Tony, of course, was already a complete musician of the highest caliber, and we all realized that and respected his awesome talent.

Would you say Tony was the realization of a sound you had already imagined, or was it something of a revelation?

Tony's extraordinary playing certainly made our sound even more unique, and his rhythmic approach to my music immediately gave it



incredible strength and richness. It was truly a labor of love, and we rehearsed nearly daily for three months until we played our first gig in Bolinas, California, in January of 1976. Tony was an ideal band member and although I would have loved to have incorporated his singing and bluegrass repertoire into the band, he was adamant in his desire to play “dawg music.” In fact, he named the style!

Since Tony spent significant parts of his life in California, Florida, and North Carolina, would you say the essence of his personality was more West Coaster or more Southerner?

Tony Rice was a unique individual and, in many respects, very enigmatic. I wouldn't classify him as being from any particular locale, but rather the embodiment of everything that ever influenced him, geographically and culturally. He deeply loved great music, musicians, and sound. Although he was playing in what I consider to be one of the best bluegrass bands of all time when we met, he was listening to modern jazz almost exclusively. T was a gentle, sweet soul who funneled most of his intellectual, emotional, and spiritual pursuits into the music he played. The rest is still inside. His presence has permanently graced my life, and I will always love him and the music he made.



Chris Eldridge

Reflections on a generous and respectful mentor

What about Tony stood out to you and made you want to play guitar like he did?

What are your earliest memories of him as a musician and a person?

I really started being just gobsmacked by Tony when I was about 14, after my mom bought me his record *Acoustics*. But the lightbulb really switched on for me when I saw the Tony Rice Unit at Graves Mountain Lodge, this bluegrass festival in Syria, Virginia, in the Appalachian Mountains. It felt like it was Zeus up there onstage. The whole band was great—they were all these beautiful musicians—but Tony just had this presence, both musically and physically. His head was down, and he was very calm and settled, but also so intense. It didn't seem like he was fighting anything, so that was also just very striking.

Did you spend a lot of time with him? Did you ever get to jam together?

Once I started getting more serious about acoustic guitar, at a certain point, through pure nepotism, I started sitting in with the Seldom Scene. [Eldridge's father, Ben Eldridge, was a founding member of the group. —ed.] The Scene used to

play every New Year's Eve at The Birchmere [in Alexandria, VA] with the Tony Rice Unit. I played onstage with Tony when I was probably 16, and he was really nice about it. Even when I was young, he always treated me with respect as a person and as a musician, and that was very meaningful.

Then, when I was in college at Oberlin, I really bonded with him at MerleFest, in 2001, which is where that photograph came from of me and him sitting together on the bed. I was sitting there that night playing his guitar—the Holy Grail of acoustic guitars—and at one

point he's like, “Critter, lean over here with that thing.” He was smoking a cigarette, and ashed it in the soundhole. Swear to God. I was like, “Ah, are you sure you want to be doing that?” He was like, “Yes.” He maintained that it helped with humidity in the spring months.

It goes back to his cultivating a vibe. I feel like even when people talk about that guitar, it has such a strong mystique.

People say it's not a great guitar, and I think those people don't know what the hell they're talking about. It's the most amazing guitar I

“

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think I've ever played, and, like you're saying, there is some vibe that lives around it. I got to take it to a jam session once and play it for a whole evening. I logged some hours with that thing, and it's an unbelievable instrument. It's the most responsive acoustic guitar I've ever played in my life, bar none, hands down. You can touch it with a feather and you get this beautiful full-range thing. Incredible.

How would you describe its tone and setup?

By the time I started hanging with Tony, he'd started having arthritis, a lot of hand problems,

and so the action was set impossibly low. It was literally like a Telecaster, which is why I think a lot of people thought it was a junky guitar, because they would bash on it and it would just buzz and send out this awful sound, like a bunch of tin cans. But Tony really knew how to play it and coax the sound out of it. That was the thing with that guitar: If you played it with that beautiful, delicate, empathetic, sensitive touch, what it had to give is unlike any guitar I've ever played.

I used to sit and just play a string on that guitar and just listen to the sound that it

would make. It was so beautiful—very direct, but also complex at the same time. There was nothing in the low end that made it feel unwieldy. But it was one of the most difficult guitars I ever played, because it was so responsive. I think Tony really played himself into that guitar and they became as one in this really beautiful way over time.

Talk about the time you spent studying with Tony when you were at Oberlin.

It was totally magical. I was there with my total hero, and he was so generous. He wanted to help me become a great musician. He was very interested in the cultivation of music to share your essence and your soul. Tony loved musicians who were courageous in that way and figured out a way to transmit who they were and what they were about. One of the big things he was trying to impress upon me was that who cares if you're a great guitar player? That is absolutely not the end of the road; that is just a stepping-stone.

The thing that he said that probably has stuck with me more than anything else is, "Look, the whole goal of what we're doing here is to collaborate with our fellow musicians to make sounds that are pleasing to the ear." That doesn't mean that it has to be a bunch of gently strummed major-seventh chords with a bossa-nova beat. It just means that you all are playing towards a common purpose, and you're listening and trying to make something beautiful happen.

In other words, you're living for the music, you're honoring the music, and Tony very much exemplified that better than anyone in our little world, in my opinion. He was able to give that part of himself beyond the amazing technique and the beautiful musicianship. Everybody sounded better when they played with Tony Rice. We all feel those human connection aspects when we listen to his music, whether we're aware of it or not. That's my understanding and explanation that I take from Tony as to why he's the greatest, and the kind of musician that ultimately I aspire to be like. That's the big lesson.



JEROMIE B STEPHENS

PHOTOGRAPHING TONY RICE

The very first time I photographed Tony Rice was in his dressing room at Wolf Trap, in Vienna, Virginia, during the 1994 Ricky Skaggs Pickin' Party. As we talked, I was surprised that Rice knew exactly what my 400mm lens was. He asked to see it, so into his hands it went.

Rice had a deep love for photography, lamenting it was hard to find time for it anymore. He collected Canon F-1 cameras and was searching for a rare power cable, which I knew I could find, so he wrote his phone number on a card and said please call him if I do. A few days later, I had the cable and Rice was stoked. From then on we were photo buddies. Whenever we saw each other, we'd talk cameras. I'd always have some new prints for him—he liked to sign and give them to his friends at the show.

Rice was as serious a photographer as anyone else I knew and even shot the cover images for a few of his records. More than once he would hand me his guitar, take one of my cameras, and begin shooting. This photo he took of me is my

favorite image, made in his room after a Birchmere show, in Alexandria, Virginia.



TONY RICE

What made photographing Rice special to me was how easy the images came. Always dressed for church, he glided around with a conservation of energy; he never looked or acted in a hurry. Going back through my contact sheets reminded me of the calm space he seemed to generate around him. For a while we were in the same orbit, which was cool. He didn't mind me being around taking photos, and I enjoyed making gallery prints for him in return. I am thankful for all those times. —Jeromie Stephens



Bryn Davies

A devoted friend and collaborator

When did you first discover Tony's music?

I first started listening to Tony when I was in college at Berklee. The guys who lived in the apartment above me my sophomore year were just insane bluegrass fans and they introduced me to the David Grisman Quintet and the Tony Rice Unit and all that kind of stuff, and I



was fascinated. Towards the end of college I met Peter Rowan and started playing with him. I think it was just around a year after I had started playing with Pete, and he was like, "Hey, I've been doing some duo stuff with Tony here and there." And then it eventually turned into the quartet with Sharon Gilchrist on mandolin.

Did Peter and Tony share roles as bandleaders, or was Tony more the leader?

I think Peter was more the leader of that band. Tony definitely took a back seat to what Peter wanted to do, and I think for nothing else other than that he had led his own band for so long and he was just ready to be a worker bee. He loved how different Peter's songwriting was, and I think people always thought it was such a weird mix because Peter is such a different player than Tony.

And so I think that's what Tony was attracted to, and also the fact that he could play those Peter Rowan songs and have a completely different outlet than the hard-driving 'grass stuff and the jazzy stuff that he had been in charge of. I really think he was ready to just let people tell him, "Okay, we're

going to play this song now," and not have to make those decisions on stage.

What was Tony like as a band leader in the Unit versus with Peter?

I feel like at that point in his career, Tony assembled the Unit to be players that he just really felt comfortable with letting do whatever they wanted to do, like [his brother] Wyatt [Rice on guitar] and Rickie [Simpkins on fiddle] had been in the band forever. He would talk a little bit on stage with the Rice Unit about the songs and things and sometimes he would tell little stories and make people laugh.

My last show with Tony was in May 2012, so I played with the Unit for eight or nine years. He was just always really gentle, always very generous, even though he was "Tony Rice." He was like, "Oh, let's do this song because Rickie sounds awesome on it." Or, "Let's do this duet so that Bryn can do a solo"—even though I was never the kind of technical player that could do bass solos over really fast, crazy stuff.

How would you describe Tony's personality?

Well, he wasn't one to just sit there and talk

endlessly about nothing; he wasn't one of the people who would just sit there and tell you their life story at the drop of a hat. Even on days off, his jeans were perfect and he had a belt on and he always wore a collared shirt. I wouldn't say he was anal, because there wasn't a pretension about it. He just carried himself very well.

I miss him a lot. When he died, I was so upset. The last time I played with him was about three months before my son was born, and he is eight now. And I was telling my husband, "I can't believe I'll never get to play with him again." Because I always had that in the back of my head: Tony's going to come back and we're going to do some awesome show at some fun thing when he feels like he can make an appearance publicly again.

Tony was a really good friend. He was the person I could call at midnight and be like, "Hey, I'm in trouble," and he'd ask, "What can I do to help?" If you were a friend of Tony's, he was the most loyal person in the world, and I've missed that friendship. I'm really sad that we'll never get to play together again, but I feel so incredibly blessed that I had a time with him.

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HERE'S HOW



JOHN W. WARREN

Creative Soundscapes

Using effects pedals with acoustic guitars

BY JOHN W. WARREN

In the right hands, the sound of a steel-string acoustic or classical guitar, played on the couch, strummed around a campfire, or performed in a concert hall, is perhaps unparalleled in beauty and harmonic richness. Efforts to amplify acoustic and classical guitars for performance often focus on projecting a natural, uncolored sound. Nevertheless, creative breakthroughs and new approaches to your acoustic playing can be found through experimentation with effects pedals that are often associated with electric guitar and bass.

1 GET CREATIVE

Pedals designed to help acoustic guitarists accurately project the natural sound of their instrument, such as the L.R. Baggs Align Series, the Fishman Aura, and a wide variety of others, are frequently reviewed in *AG* and elsewhere.

Acoustic guitarists can also generate exciting new sounds by experimenting with the plethora of pedals designed for electric guitars and other instruments. Tip: Add texture to a livestreaming performance, break out of a creative rut, and inspire improvisation and songwriting by exploring the sonic possibilities offered by electric guitar stompboxes on acoustic guitar.

2 COMMENCE CLEAN

Begin with an acoustic or classical guitar that has a good-quality pickup, which, although not absolutely necessary, will help you to run your guitar through effects pedals. A vast variety of different pickups are available, including undersaddle piezos, soundboard transducers, and soundhole pickups; the L.R. Baggs Anthem, for example, combines a pickup and internal microphone. Some pickups may sound brittle or be prone to feedback if not

conditioned by a preamp, compressor, or DI. If your guitar sound is not clean before feeding it into effects pedals, the results will be less than desirable.

3 BREAK THE RULES

It's easy to swap around a couple of pedals, but as your effects chain grows, your tone can get muddy or sound boomy without the right approach. Tuners are generally placed right after your instrument. Compressors are typically placed near the front of the chain, but often after effects like pitch, fuzz, distortion, or overdrive, to get full dynamic response from these effects.

Modulation effects, which introduce instability and change over time, are often best placed later in the chain. Delay generally goes before reverb. Reverb is usually best near the end of the chain, as it diffuses and dissolves the sound.

Loopers and experimental time effects like freeze, granular, and glitch, are flexible and can be placed last to record your instrument through the entire chain, or anywhere at all.

These guidelines may be helpful in ordering your effects from instrument to output, but find the approach that works for you, your instrument, and your musical style. Tip: Try placing certain effects, such as delay and reverb, in your amp's effect loop, after its preamp, while running other effects from instrument to amp.

4 TAME YOUR DYNAMICS

Compressors control your tone's dynamic range, making the quiet notes louder and the louder notes quieter, for a smoother listening experience and improved sustain. A good compressor may even sound like it's not doing anything, until you turn it off and notice the difference. The Gurus Optivalve and Effectrode PC-2A are tube-based compressors that sound stunning with acoustic guitar. Tip: Overuse of a compressor can squash your instrument's dynamics, while judicious use can help you play more dynamically and avoid sharp or harsh transients.

5 FREEZE!

Freeze, essentially a very short loop, allows you to produce sustain, add a supporting chord beneath your playing, or stack layers of sounds for floating polyphony or ambient pad effects. Dedicated freeze or sustain pedals include the Electro-Harmonix Superego+ and the Gamechanger Audio Plus Pedal, among others. Many reverb pedals, including the Walrus Audio Slö, Cusack Music Resound, and Chase Bliss Audio Dark World, offer the ability to produce sustain or latching, pad-like sounds, via a momentary footswitch. Tip: Pair freeze with modulation to create movement that provides harmonic interest and change in your frozen sound.

6 MAKE MODULATION

Modulation is a family of a variety of effects, but what unites them is movement. Waveforms and their shapes, such as triangle, sine, square, saw, and ramp, form the heart of modulation effects. Low frequency modulators (LFOs) create movement by adjusting parameters such as depth and rate. Tremolo is the modulation of volume (not to be confused with the classical guitar technique), while vibrato is pitch modulation; some pedals allow you to alternate or mix these two.

Flangers can create psychedelic sounds but can be subtle and natural-sounding as well. Phase is a bit more refined, producing pleasing

and even dreamlike phase cancellation. Rotary and vibe are gateways to swirly modulation. Chorus, ubiquitous in the '80s, doubles your signal, and can make your six-string guitar sound like a 12-string. Many reverb and delay pedals also include modulation effects to create movement. EarthQuaker Devices offers several innovative modulation effects to try on acoustic guitar, including the Pyramids stereo flanging device and the Sea Machine chorus. Tip: Use creative modulation such as detuning, random modulation, glitch, and more, to add momentary interest or provide the basis for loops.

7 DEFINITELY DELAY

Delay—comprised of a recording buffer and feedback loop—produces copies or echoes of your playing that trail behind you and create ambiance. The late British guitarist John Martyn pioneered the use of the Echoplex, a tape delay, to create massive soundscapes of his acoustic (and electric) guitar playing.

This is a golden age of effects pedals, and acoustic guitarists can take advantage of these tools, as can players of other acoustic instruments.

The number of high-quality delays is vast, including the Dawner Prince Boonar, which emulates the classic Binson Echorec, a multi-head magnetic drum delay; Electro-Harmonix's Grand Canyon delay and looper; and the Meris Polymoon. Tips: Moderate use of delay can make your acoustic guitar playing sound more expansive. Create momentary bits of chaos by experimenting with self-oscillation; cascade multiple delays to create blooming effects and flexible ambience.

8 EXPLORE ALTERED AMBIANCE

Reverb simulates space, as if you're playing in a large hall or cathedral. Use reverb—actually a cluster of small, diffuse delays—to balance your mix, make recordings sound more natural, and make your sound more epic. Altered ambience such as shimmer, glisten, and pitch modulation can produce glittering, shifting undertones. Death by Audio's Reverberation Machine and Rooms, Earth-

quaker Devices' Afterneath and Avalanche Run, and many others, can create abstract, fictional spaces to broaden your acoustic guitar palette. Tips: Use delay and reverb trails for graceful transitions. Stack two or more reverb pedals in sequence to create dreamy soundscapes, atmospheric harmony, and other complex sounds. Split stereo reverb with different effects to create asymmetrical reverb.

9 GET LOOPY

Adding a looper to your effects chain—either by itself or as a part of a multieffects unit—can help liven up your practice sessions and performances. Widely associated with musicians like Ed Sheeran, a looper can turn a singer-songwriter into a band, provide inspiration for songwriting and arranging, and allow you to practice improvising solos over an indefatigable rhythm guitar part.

Start with a small loop and layer overdubbed parts for added complexity. Many loopers, such as TC Electronic's Ditto+, allow you to save your ideas, or even bring in backing tracks. Timing the start and end of loops can be tricky, but with practice you'll soon get the hang of it.

Tips: Record and loop a short riff at the end of a song, overdub a few additional chord voicings, and then solo on top of the loop (alter your tone between these layers with different modulations or other effects). Place multiple loopers in your pedalboard to capture moments that can play against each other like different orbits of song and sound.

10 BRING IT ALL TOGETHER

It's not necessary for all the pedals in your chain to work together if you don't necessarily want to use them that way; think of your pedalboard as having different pockets, or mini-chains, that work well together. Try recording a dry, direct guitar track and use a reamp box to add effects after capturing a solid take; some audio interfaces also offer reamp capabilities. Find the combination of pedals that works for you, that shapes your sound and fits your artistic vision.

This is a golden age of effects pedals, and acoustic guitarists can take advantage of these tools, as can players of other acoustic instruments. While effects should ultimately be used in service of the song, experimentation and happy accidents can lead to creative breakthroughs in performance, composition, and improvisation. You'll soon learn that effects pedals can be instruments in themselves.

John W. Warren is a guitarist and composer in the Washington, D.C., area. johnwwarren.com

Filling Spaces

How to flesh out chord-melody work with tremolo picking and passing chords

BY GREG RUBY

THE PROBLEM

You don't know how to fill the space during a long note or extended rest during a chord-melody arrangement.

THE SOLUTION

Use tremolo picking on long notes and passing chords over multiple measures of rest. Try applying this approach on an arrangement of the New Orleans jazz standard "Careless Love Blues."

1 GET INTO TREMOLO

Tremolo picking is a plectrum technique that uses repetitious down/up strokes on a single note. Because a note on the guitar begins to decay almost instantly after it is struck, using tremolo allows for a sense of sustain of a single note over a longer duration of time.

At moderate tempos, tremolo picking is often subdivided as a sextuplet on a single note. **Example 1** illustrates this picking on the note A. The subdivision of six notes in one beat can also be written as a quarter note with three lines through it. (Note: In classical

music this symbol refers to an unmeasured tremolo, but for our purposes we will treat it as a sextuplet subdivision.)

It is important to accurately subdivide your tremolo. A helpful practice technique is to set a metronome to a slow tempo (60 bpm or so) and play a quarter note followed by a sextuplet, etc., as illustrated in **Example 2**. When the tempo is brisk, it often becomes necessary to decrease the subdivision to either 16th notes or triplets in order to stay in time. **Example 3** provides an opportunity to practice different subdivisions. It is helpful to know which ones you can handle at any given tempo.

Example 4 integrates the sextuplet subdivision into an F major scale (F G A B $\flat$ C D E) on the first string. Practice this technique slowly and accurately at a consistent tempo; once you achieve a sense of relaxation and ease, gradually increase the tempo. Remember, speed is a byproduct of slow, focused practice, not the other way around.

Once you have control over the tremolo, you can add it to the top note of a chord voicing. **Example 5** uses tremolo on the top note of an F major triad. Hold the chord down while playing tremolo on the highest note. In this example, play the tremolo over two beats



AMBER FRENCH



and then release to two quarter notes. This can be applied to any chord.

2 PASS THE TIME

Another way to fill in the empty space of a chord melody is to strum chords during periods of rest. I like to think of myself as returning to the rhythm section, so to speak, for those measures and when playing lower-voiced rhythm chords. A passing chord is one that connects two diatonic chords (those within the key), and using passing chords is a great way to create harmonic movement during rests. **Example 6** sets up a situation where A is the melody note on beat one while the chord progression is moving from F major to C7 to F major. This issue is solved by using lower-voiced rhythm guitar chords with the A^bdim7 functioning as a passing chord.

3 PLAY "CARELESS LOVE BLUES"

In **Example 7** (p. 46), tremolo picking and passing chords are applied in "Careless Love Blues," a great standard that includes notable recordings by Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Lead Belly, and a modern vocal interpretation by Madeleine Peyroux. My favorite is Danny Barker's six-string banjo

version. You will find many of his embellishments included in this arrangement. If you are not aware of Barker, read up on his history and check out the album *The Fabulous Banjo of Danny Barker*.

This arrangement starts with a series of eighth notes that lead into an F chord with the A note as the melody. Hold the chord for the entire measure while using tremolo picking for the first two beats. Exit the tremolo on beat three with a downstroke. This beat shouldn't sound like a separate quarter note, but instead part of the tremolo.

It is helpful to plan your exits for the tremolo. Remember to keep the tremolo picking in time. In measure 2, the melody is harmonized with a C7 chord switching on every beat. In last issue's lesson [March/April 2021], we discussed utilizing a rest stroke to bring out the melody and to prevent your pick from accidentally striking the first string. Be sure and use the rest stroke on measure 2 as you change between the different inversions.

After the F chord on beat one of measure 3, start playing rhythm guitar by strumming the same chord with downstroke eighth notes for beat two through measure 5. Use the tremolo again and then hold the D7 for two beats on

measure 6, while striking the top note of the chord twice as a quarter using an upstroke on the second beat.

Play the "fill" chords on measures 7 and 8 using triplets. On each beat, try the strumming pattern down-up-down, as the first downstroke will help you keep time. End the rhythm passage with a firm downstroke on beat four of measure 8. Bar 11 uses an inversion of B^b descending the fretboard until it changes to a B^bm at the first fret on measure 12. Bars 13 and 14 are identical to measures 1 and 2 and the song concludes with a quick I-IV-iv-I (F-B^b6-B^bm6-F) turnaround.

When you integrate the tremolo technique into your playing, whether on "Careless Love Blues" or any other tune, make sure that your timing is always accurate. If the sextuplet subdivision is too difficult to achieve at a given tempo, try a smaller subdivision in its place. This can achieve the same desired result, especially at brisker tempos.

Greg Ruby is a guitarist, composer, historian, and teacher specializing in jazz from the first half of the 20th century. His latest book is *The Oscar Alemán Play-Along Songbook Vol. 1*. Ruby teaches Zoom lessons and classes. For more information, visit gregrubymusic.com.

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

Example 5

Example 6



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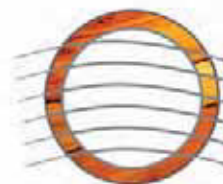
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Jontavious Willis

Poor Boy, Long Ways from Home

Learn an open-G guitar arrangement inspired by a slide banjo classic

BY JONTAVIOUS WILLIS

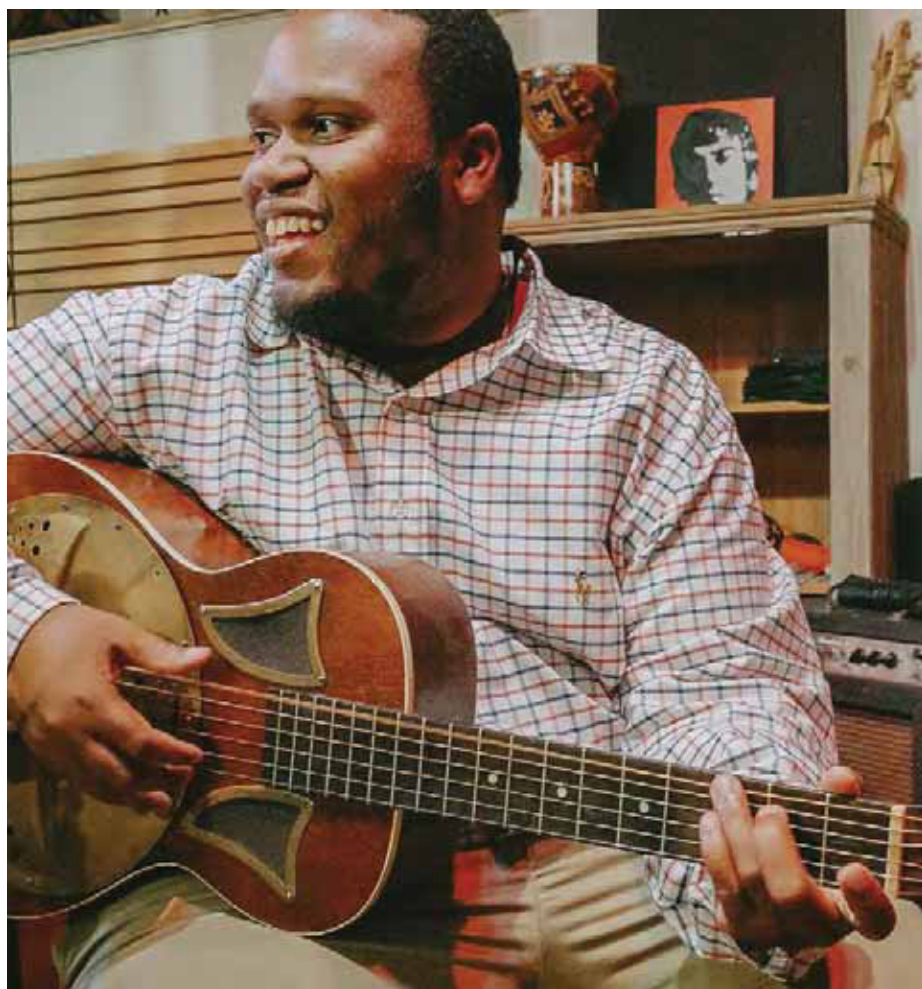
Whenever I learn a piece, I usually go back to an original or early version. So I based my arrangement of the traditional song "Poor Boy, Long Ways from Home" on a recording that banjoist and jug-band pioneer Gus Cannon (1883–1979) recorded in 1927, rather than on later versions by Mississippi John Hurt, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Howlin' Wolf, or any number of other blues guitarists.

The interesting thing about Cannon's arrangement is that he played it on slide banjo, during the blues craze of the early 20th century. It was right around that time that guitars became more affordable, replacing banjos in blues, jazz, and other styles, so I think of this recording as kind of a bridge between early banjo and open-tuned guitar approaches. Cannon's recording sounds in the key of G $\flat$ major, and his approach translates well to guitar in open G (D G D G B D). If you're unfamiliar with this tuning, to get into it from standard, simply lower strings 1 and 6 down a whole step, from E to D, and string 5 down a step as well, from A to G.

THE FORM

"Poor Boy, Long Ways from Home," aka "Poor Boy Blues," is based on a 16-bar form, rather than the 12-bar blues which is more common. Other well-known examples of 16-bar blues songs include "See See Rider" and "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man." In "Poor Boy," the chord progression of bars 5–8 (IV–I or C7–G7) is played twice to create the 16-bar form. I play through the form six times in my version, with guitar only on the first, fourth, and sixth times, and adding vocals on the other repeats.

As the song is played in an open tuning, you can form the I chord on the open strings or by placing the slide across the 12th fret, the IV chord at the fifth fret, and the V chord at the seventh. Basically, I pick a bunch of different



THE KURLAND AGENCY

improvised variations around these positions and add a bass line with my thumb, played mostly in quarter notes throughout.

THE TECHNIQUES

I'd recommend playing "Poor Boy" with the slide on whatever finger works best for you—I prefer wearing it on my fourth finger. In this arrangement, the most important thing is not going for perfect technique but thinking of the slide as a continuation of the voice. That's why I sometimes leave out words when I'm singing the verses—the slide picks up where the lyrics drop out. Just remember to think like a singer when you're playing the guitar parts.

Many slide guitarists place their available fretting fingers behind the slide to mute any unwanted notes or overtones. Sometimes I mute—especially if I really want to emphasize a single note—but most of the time I prefer not to, because a lot of the older guys didn't mute, and I like the sound that those overtones add. That said, you might try palm-muting the bass notes (placing your picking-hand palm lightly against the strings as you pick the notes, for a

slightly muffled effect). This technique will provide a nice separation between the bass line and the vocal-like slide melodies.

Another thing to note is that in certain measures (7, 11, and 15), I'm not using the slide at all. I never cared for straight slide—that's what lap slide is for. Think of these spots as kind of instrumental breaks between vocal phrases. Without removing the slide, just use any free fretting fingers to play the fretted notes, and be sure not to lose the groove when you move between the slide and standard-fretted passages.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

The notation here shows only what I play the first time through the 16-bar form of "Poor Boy." I rarely do things exactly the same way—check out the video at AcousticGuitar.com to get a sense of the different variations I play on repeats. After you've learned the notation as written here—again, playing the slide lines like a singer, anchored by the steady bass notes—you'll be ready to take things to the next level and make your own arrangement of this blues classic. **AC**

POOR BOY, LONG WAYS FROM HOME

TRADITIONAL

Tuning: D G D G B D

q = 147

with ad lib variations on repeats
2nd, 3rd, and 5th times, see lyrics

G7

with slide

C7 **G7**

C7 **G7**

D7 **C7** **G7**

1.-5.
G7

Cont. on p. 50

Cont. from p. 49

6. G7

2. **G7**
Poor boy, long ways from home

Long ways from home, good Lord

C7 G7
I'm a long ways

C7 G7
Poor boy, long ways from home

D7 C7 G7
I'm a long ways

3. **G7**
Got nowhere to lay my worried head

My worried head, good Lord

C7 G7
I ain't lay my worried

C7 G7
Got nowhere to lay my worried

D7 C7 G7
I ain't got nowhere to lay my worried

5. **G7**
Telephone to my

Long-distance phone, good Lord

C7 G7
I said give me long distance

C7 G7
Hello Central, give me long distance

D7 C7 G7
Hello Central, give me long distance

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American Beauty

Colorful folk, country, and bluegrass licks for warming up or composing

BY CATHY FINK

It's amazing how learning a new riff or lick can inspire a new song or instrumental. Just when you've hit a wall and feel stuck in your playing, a few fresh patterns can breathe life into your instrument and your creative juices. With all that in mind, I've created this lesson of Americana-inspired examples, drawn from the folk, country, and bluegrass traditions, which work two ways: You can approach them simply as exercises, or you can use them to launch your next song or arrangement.

I've organized these go-to licks based on common keys for songwriting, which are also perfect for instrumental work. Most of these examples work equally well with fingerpicking and flatpicking, so try them both ways. On the accompanying video at AcousticGuitar.com, I demonstrate lots of different picking and strumming patterns for each example. I like to call these variations ear candy.

The more familiar you become with each lick, the easier it will be for you to start creating your own variations from that starting point. You'll find that you can string together many of these licks for extended exercises. And, as you play them fluidly, they will naturally find their way into your playing.

WEEK ONE

Let's start this week simply. In **Example 1**, keep your third finger held on the low G throughout. Combined with the open D and B strings, this note forms a simple G chord. On beat three of each measure, add your first and second fingers to the second-string C and fourth-string E, respectively, forming a C chord with the fifth, G, in the bass (written as C/G). You can also hammer on the C/G chord, as shown in **Example 2**. Once you've got the hang of what the fretting fingers do, you can play around



MICHAEL G. STEWART

with these licks, letting the strings ring or dampening them with the palm of your picking hand, for a rock 'n' roll effect.

Example 3 builds off of the previous two figures. In bar 1, after you've added the C shape, move it up two frets on the *and* of beat four. Try experimenting with different syncopations sliding up and down the double-stops (two-note chords) on strings 2 and 4. **Example 4** is similar to the previous figures but is based on double stops on strings 2 and 3. The difference is subtle but tasty—in the second half of bar 1, for instance, notice how, in conjunction with the G bass tone, the upper notes A and C form a colorful Gsus2/4 chord.

In a different direction, **Example 5** focuses on a bluesy bass run that works well for the G chord. Use your first and second fingers for each hammer-on, and try to connect the notes as smoothly as possible. Having a bunch of interesting ways to play around in the bass gives you interesting options as you play covers or originals.

WEEK TWO

This week you'll work on a handful of different ways to travel between D and G chords. **Example 6** is based on a simple descending bass line—D–C–B–A–G—which makes for a D–Csus2–G/B–A7sus4–G chord progression. Approaching the G chord with a hammer-on from the low F# lends a hint of bluegrass flavor.

I like to play this as written with a thumbpick and fingers for a mellow sound, and I add a little right-hand flair when I play a flatpicking version. Remember to check out the video to see a bunch of different variations.

Moving in the opposite direction, **Example 7** is based on an ascending bass line, D–E–F–F#–G, which is mostly chromatic. When you play this, whether fingerpicking or strumming, be sure to give extra emphasis to the colorful bass pattern, and experiment with different rhythmic variations. **Example 8** shows another approach to Ex. 7. Notice how I disrupt the established bass line with an open A on beat three of bar 1, changing the chord name to A7sus4. In bar 3, I slide into a unison (simultaneous open G and fifth-fret G) on beat one. Then, there's a single-note fill that lands on the root note of the G chord on the downbeat of the final bar.

WEEK THREE

We'll stay in the key of G this week, and I'll show you different ways of getting from Am to G chords. The first progression (**Example 9**)

Beginners' Tip #1

For all the examples in this lesson, keep each chord shape held for as long as possible, letting the notes ring together.

Beginners' Tip #2

Try playing each of these licks both fingerstyle (or with a thumbpick and fingers) and with a flatpick.



WEEK 1

Example 1

G C/G G C/G G C/G G C/G etc.

Example 3

G C/G D^{add4} C *play three times* G C/G G

Example 4

G G^{sus2} G C/G G

Example 5

N.C. G

WEEK 2

Example 6

D C^{sus2} G/B A^{7sus4} G

Example 7

D E^{m7} G⁷ G^{maj7} G

uses a simple, mostly descending bass line (A–G–F#–G), which creates an Am–C/G–D/F#–G chord progression. This works beautifully whether fingerpicked or flatpicked. Again, see the video for some slight variations that make playing the same progression more interesting.

Example 10 is similar to Ex. 9. I call this the “Lucky Girl” lick, after a song I wrote around it. Note the use of the hammer-on in bar 2, briefly touching on the D chord’s flattened seventh, C, for a bit of color. Also check out how in the last bar I use the same double-stop idea from Ex. 3.

This week’s last lick, **Example 11**, is less

harmonically involved and shows a different strategy for keeping things interesting. In the first three bars I strum the top four notes of an open Am chord, decorating it by hammering on to the lower notes from the open third and fourth strings. I end with a G chord in the last measure, but for added mileage, try inserting any D chord in between the Am and G.

WEEK FOUR

This week we’ll move to the key of C major.

Example 12 takes a straightforward I–IV–V (C–F–G) progression and fancies it up with some jazzy chords like Fmaj7/G and G9. Don’t let their names scare you; they are easy and natural to fret, and impart new colors to a well-worn chord progression. For the most efficient movement, keep your fourth finger held in place on the third-fret G for the C and Fadd9 chords.

In **Example 13**, I bring back the descending bass line idea introduced in previous figures to go between the C and F chords. For the Fsus2,

note that I’m fretting the low F by wrapping my thumb around the neck, and I’m playing the G string open instead of using the second-fret A. That’s what gives the chord its nice harmonic flavor. You can experiment with different ways to resolve this progression, either by adding a C chord at the end, or C and then G.

Cathy Fink is a Grammy Award-winning multi-instrumentalist based in the Washington D.C. area. She teaches bluegrass and Americana guitar and performs around the world with her partner, Marcy Marxer. cathymarcy.com

Beginners’ Tip #3

Experiment with new harmonies by lifting a finger from a given chord shape and replacing the fretted note with an open string.

Beginners’ Tip #4

Using sophisticated jazz chords, like those in **Example 12**, is a great way to spice up your music regardless of style.

Example 8

Chord progression: D, A7sus4, G7, Gmaj7, G

WEEK 3

Example 9

Chord progression: Am, C/G, D/F#, G

Example 10

Chord progression: Am, Asus2/G, D/F#, Dadd4/F#, C/E, G/D



Example 11

Am G

WEEK 4

Example 12

C Fadd9 Fmaj7/G G9 etc.

Example 13

C C/B Am7 C/G F_{sus2}

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Finding common notes between chords can lend a sense of sophistication to your music. At the same time, using common tones can make it easier to switch between chords. In this more complex variation of Ex. 13, keep your fourth finger on the third-fret G for the duration of the first two bars. Note that the G is both the fifth of the C chord and the minor seventh of Am7.

C C/B Am7 C/G F_{sus2}

Lovely Day

Play a guitar arrangement of Bill Withers' classic love song

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Bill Withers (see “Acoustic Soul,” p. 20) released the sunshiny hit “Lovely Day” on his 1977 album, *Menagerie*. He wrote the song with Skip Scarborough—also known for his contributions to the repertoire of Anita Baker and Earth, Wind, and Fire—and by Withers' account, Scarborough was primarily responsible for the music. The lyrical message of optimism, gratitude, and love is pure Withers.

“Lovely Day” has had a long life in covers, remixes, and soundtracks. The S.O.U.L. S.Y.S.T.E.M. reinvented it with rap verses as “It’s Gonna Be a Lovely Day” on the blockbuster soundtrack to *The Bodyguard*. A collection called *Studio Rio Presents: The Brazil Connection* laid Withers' own vocals over a samba-style arrangement. More recently, the

duo Pomplamoose released a clever mashup of Withers' song with Lizzo's “Good as Hell,” and Demi Lovato sang “Lovely Day” for a presidential inauguration event this year.

The original “Lovely Day” track is carried primarily by keyboard, strings, and bass, but the song works nicely on guitar. On the original recording, the I chord is E, but you might instead try playing it as Emaj7—use the same shape as for Cmaj7, up at the seventh fret. First try strumming through the chords. The intro, verse, and chorus use essentially the same progression, with small variations in the last two chords: sometimes the Cmaj7 falls on beat one and other times on beat three; leading into the pre-chorus, hold the Cmaj7 for a full measure and skip the Bm7. Also



note that the pre-chorus repeats the same two chords but changes the bass notes beneath them, resulting first in C/D and D/E (with the bass note on the fifth string) and then Am7 and Bm7 (bass note on the sixth string).

Once you're comfortable with the changes, try the pattern shown in the tab, which incorporates the original bass line transposed up an octave. Try a touch of palm muting to make the bass notes pop a little more. **AC**

LOVELY DAY

WORDS AND MUSIC BY SKIP SCARBOROUGH AND BILL WITHERS

Chords

E: x1333x 7 fr.
C#m7: x1312x 4 fr.
Amaj7: 1x342x 5 fr.
Cmaj7: x1324
Bm7: x1312x
C/D: x1111x
D/E: x1111x 7 fr.
Am7: 2x333x
Bm7(VII): 2x333x 7 fr.

Main Pattern

E C#m7

Pre-Chorus Pattern

Amaj7 Cmaj7 Bm7 C/D

etc.

D/E **Am7** **Bm7**

etc.

Intro

E C#m7 Amaj7 Cmaj7 Bm7

E C#m7 Amaj7 Cmaj7 Bm7

E C#m7

1. When I wake up in the morning love

Amaj7 Cmaj7 Bm7

And the sunlight hurts my eyes

E C#m7

And something without warning love

Amaj7 Cmaj7

Bears heavy on my mind

Pre-Chorus

C/D D/E

Then I look at you

Am7 Bm7(VII)

And the world's alright with me

C/D D/E

Just one look at you

Am7 Bm7(VII)

And I know it's gonna be

Chorus

E C#m7

A lovely day (Lovely day, lovely day, lovely day, lovely day)

Amaj7 Cmaj7 Bm7

Lovely day, lovely day, lovely day, lovely day)

E C#m7

A lovely day (Lovely day, lovely day, lovely day, lovely day)

Amaj7 Cmaj7 Bm7

Lovely day, lovely day, lovely day, lovely day)

E C#m7

2. When the day that lies ahead of me

Amaj7 Cmaj7 Bm7

Seems impossible to face

E C#m7

When someone else instead of me

Amaj7 Cmaj7

Always seems to know the way

Repeat Pre-Chorus

Repeat Chorus

Repeat Verse 2

Repeat Pre-Chorus

Repeat Chorus till end



WILLIAM GRAHAM/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Beaumont Rag

Tony Rice's exuberant take on a classic fiddle tune

BY ALAN BARNOSKY

I remember the day I first heard Tony Rice's album *Manzanita*. I was a cash-strapped college kid quickly becoming obsessed with bluegrass when I saw the CD at a shop. I dropped \$20 for it at the register, put it in the Sony Discman that was rigged through my car's tape deck, and drove back to my apartment amazed by Rice's vocals, his effortless playing, his warm tone, and the skill and playfulness of his bandmates. I later dug into all of Rice's albums: the duets with Norman Blake and Ricky Skaggs, his solo records, his bluegrass groups. They are all perfect. Fifteen years later, I still keep that memorable copy of *Manzanita* in my car.

Many guitarists flock to Tony Rice because of his jaw-dropping leads. However, Rice's epic solos are only a small element of what made his music so special. He reinvented bluegrass rhythm guitar, he was one of the genres greatest vocalists, and I personally am most drawn to his sincere and humble musicianship. Rice's intuitive musical sensibilities elevated the performers around him, revealed

deeper meanings in the songs, and made his recordings some of the best acoustic albums of all time.

I was talking about this with Marcel Ardans, a specialist in Rice-style guitar who runs the *Lessons with Marcel* YouTube channel. Marcel has become known for dissecting and analyzing Rice's approach, and he says, "While I can write down the licks and explain them, none of us can execute them like Tony." There is something special about Tony Rice that no one can truly emulate. In a genre with many who try to play just like him, there was and forever will be only one Tony Rice.

As a slice into the mystery of Rice's guitar, presented here is "Beaumont Rag" from the 1975 album *California Autumn*. I chose this arrangement for a few reasons: "Beaumont Rag" is a well-known standard that can be played at any jam. The transcription serves as an excellent introduction to Rice's approach, and it's not readily available elsewhere. Plus, this version incorporates both typical flatpicking approaches (bars 1–2 are similar to how Doc

Watson played it) and passages that are Rice-style gems (bars 10–11 and 14–15).

I naturally play "Beaumont Rag" using alternate picking, as shown in the second pick direction line in the transcription. However, this is not how Rice did it. His pick-direction choices were largely dependent on the most efficient way to sound notes. The top line approximates how I believe he played it, based on reviewing live footage of him performing this tune. His approach is not an exact science. It requires an exceptional degree of right-hand control and timing and is nearly impossible to mimic. I sometimes use Rice's approach as a picking drill but choose alternating when it comes time to play the tune.

Rice's recent passing was a saddening shock for longtime fans. For those who are less familiar with Rice, this AG issue can open you up to his music, much like that classic CD served as my introduction. Either way, now is a great time to give one of his albums a spin. Thankfully, Rice's recordings will always be here, and they will always be perfect.

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Capo II

h = 126

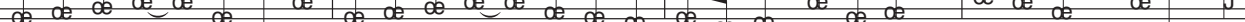
% With ad lib variations on repeat

G C

Rice: 
 Alternating: 

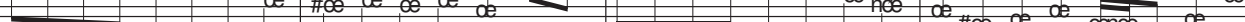
1 3 0 1 3 1 0 0 3 0 3 0 0 0 4 0 4 0 1 1 2 0 2 3 0 2 0 0

5 G C

Rice: 
 Alternating: 

0 2 3 0 0 0 0 2 3 0 2 0 3 0 0 0 2 2 0 1 3 0

9 G C

Rice: 
 Alternating: 

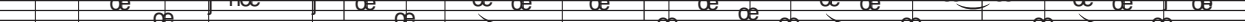
1 3 1 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 0 0 8 5 8 0 5 3 4 0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 0 3 2

13 F F#dim C Am D7 G7 C

Rice: 
 Alternating: 

1 2 3 0 3 5 4 5 3 4 0 1 2 0 1 0 3 2 3 2 0

17 G C

Rice: 
 Alternating: 

0 0 2 0 0 2 0 0 0 2 2 0 4 2 0 0



G **C N.C.**

21

G **C**

25

F **F#dim** **C** **Am** **D7** **G7**

29

C **To Coda** **D.S. al Coda**

32

128

Coda **N.C.**

161

C

162

Let Me Call You Sweetheart

Cowboy chords with a hint of jazz sophistication

BY KATE KOENIG



Maurice Tani

Written by Leo Friedman and Beth Slater Whitson, “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” was at the top of the charts in 1910. That popular recording was made by a group called the Peerless Brothers, but countless others have since arranged it, most notably Pat Boone, Fats Domino, Bing Crosby, and Valerie Carter and Linda Ronstadt.

“Let Me Call You Sweetheart” originally included both verse and chorus sections, but most popular versions since Crosby’s rendition (recorded in 1934 and again in 1944)

have consisted just of the chorus repeated, often with an instrumental interlude in between. In the simple arrangement here, the chorus is played twice.

The song uses a handful of cowboy chords—A, D, B7—with a couple of more complex harmonies thrown in, namely B $\dim$ 7 and C $\dim$ 7. As frequently seen in this department’s arrangements, Maurice Tani plays the only barre chord, F $\sharp$, by wrapping his thumb around to fret the sixth string, rather than barring all six strings. Conversely, he uses his

first finger to barre the open A chord, showing how individual chord fingerings can be.

If you find it difficult to transition to the C $\dim$ 7 chord, try visualizing the shape of your hand in place before it lands. Also, that C $\dim$ 7 comes immediately after a D, and your first finger is on the second-fret A for both chords. So, you can use your first finger as an anchor and reset the rest of your fingers around it to reach the C $\dim$ 7 chord. With a little practice, you’ll be crooning and strumming this early-20th-century hit. **AC**

LET ME CALL YOU SWEETHEART

WORDS BY BETH SLATER WHITSON AND MUSIC BY LEO FRIEDMAN

Walk-up

Strumming Patterns

Chord diagrams for A, D, and F $\sharp$ are provided above the musical notation. The F $\sharp$ diagram is labeled T34211.

The musical notation is in 3/4 time, key of D major (two sharps). The walk-up section consists of a single measure of eighth notes: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The strumming patterns are indicated by numbers 0, 2, 4 on the bass staff.

The chorus section consists of two measures of eighth notes: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The lyrics are: Let me call you sweet-heart. I'm in love.

The strumming patterns for the chorus are indicated by numbers 0, 2, 4 on the bass staff.



F# T34211 **B7** x21304 **E7** 020100

6 with you. Let me hear you

A x0111x **B^bdim7** x2304x **E7** 020100

11 whisp-er that you love me, too.

A x0111x **D** xx0132 **A** x0111x **D** xx0132

17 Keep the love - light glow - ing in your eyes

F# T34211 **B7** x21304 **D** xx0132 **Cdim7** x2314x **A** x0111x

22 so true. Let me call you sweet-heart. _

F# T34211 **D** xx0132 **E7** 020100 **A** x0111x

28 I'm in love with you.



COURTESY OF DAN ERLEWINE

The Master of His Craft

After 50 years at the forefront of the repair industry, Dan Erlewine is at the top of his game with a new collaboration

BY E.E. BRADMAN

Dan Erlewine just might be the most famous guitar repairperson on earth. His books—including *Guitar Player's Repair Guide*, *How to Make Your Electric Guitar Play Great*, *Guitar Finishing Step by Step*, *Fret Work Step by Step*, and *Trade Secrets*—are definitive reference works that have stood the test of time. His classic columns for *Guitar Player* and *Bass Player* magazines (as well as his decade-plus relationship with *Vintage Guitar*) have helped introduce the vocabulary of guitar setup to the masses, and his instruments have found their way into the hands of icons such as Jerry Garcia, Albert King, and Otis Rush. But it's Erlewine's pioneering instructional content—a slew of VHS tapes, DVDs, and YouTube videos, mostly for guitar-tool juggernaut StewMac—that have made the Athens, Ohio, resident a

mentor to three generations of guitar maintenance and repair geeks.

Today, at 76, Erlewine remains the company's most recognizable face on social media and YouTube, and he still gets animated talking about necks, nuts, frets, and other crucial components of a great guitar setup. In his videos, he's surrounded by tools of his own invention—most of which are available at StewMac—and his calm demeanor imparts a sense of methodical zen that inspired one YouTube commenter to dub him “the Bob Ross of guitar.” He's unflappable and no-nonsense but warm, grandfatherly, and even funny sometimes. When he picks up a guitar, however, it's clear that he's more than just a very good repairman.

It's hard to believe that after all these years, there's still uncharted territory for Erlewine,

but the new Iris Guitars DE-11 proves otherwise. His first signature guitar, based on a beloved 1937 Kalamazoo KG-11, features a 1930s V-shaped neck, Rickard rear-mount banjo tuning machines, an Adirondack spruce top, a satin finish, as well as Honduran mahogany back, sides, and neck. Most intriguing, its neck extends past the nut before transitioning into the ears of the peghead, and threaded brass inserts in the fingerboard accept screw-down capos. “It's the most musical new guitar I've ever owned,” says Erlewine.

THE DOMINO EFFECT

Erlewine's roots as a player and repair nerd go back to his childhood in Ann Arbor, Michigan. His mother, an artist, and his father, a businessman by day and woodworker at

home, encouraged Dan and his brothers to use tools, paint, and wood. When Erlewine got his first six-string, a Stella-like Domino, he stripped, sanded, and refinished it. Soon, he was putting inlays in friends' instruments, and it wasn't long before he found his way into the Herb David Guitar Studio ("a true acoustic music store"), where he swiftly moved from selling guitars and giving lessons to working in repairs.

Erlewine's parents' record collection—especially albums by Lead Belly, Marais & Miranda, and Josh White—primed him for the late-'50s folk craze. "My earliest influence was folk music; Bob Dylan with Michael Bloomfield was the reason I strayed into electric guitars and played in electric bands," he says. "But for the last 20 years, I've focused on playing the roots music I started with." In the '50s and '60s, Ann Arbor was a folk music hotspot, and working at the Herb David Guitar Studio gave Erlewine the opportunity to meet and hear artists like Bob Dylan, Andrés Segovia, Sabicas, Carlos Montoya, Julian Bream, Jesse Fuller, Reverend Gary Davis, Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee, the New Lost City Ramblers, and Doc Watson, as well as Clarence and Roland White with the Kentucky Colonels.

"Bob Dylan's first record, with 'Man of Constant Sorrow,' led me down the folk music rabbit hole," he says. "In 1960, I bought Pete Seeger's *Folksinger's Guitar Guide*, which came with a book and a record. I bought my Herco thumbpicks and fingerpicks, learned 'Railroad Bill' from that record, and was fingerpicking away." The arrival of the Kentucky Colonels was another seminal event. "They came to Ann Arbor in '63 or '64 to do a two-week stint at the Golden Vanity, a coffeehouse I managed at night, and Clarence White became my new hero," Erlewine remembers. "Clarence taught me to play 'Wildwood Flower,' a song I already knew, but he crosspicked it. He called his technique McReynolds picking [after bluegrass mandolinist Jesse McReynolds], and he told me to get Doc Watson's new record. That's when I got my first flatpick."

BUILDING A LEGACY

As much as he loved playing, Erlewine decided to devote less time to "making it big in the music scene," and in 1969, he opened Erlewine Instruments in Ann Arbor. A couple years later, he began building electric guitars; two of his most famous creations are Albert King's famed "Lucy," a Flying V, and Jerry Garcia's "Stratishcaster," a Strat with a Gibson stop tailpiece, a rosewood pickguard, and rosewood numbers inlaid in the fretboard ("so Jerry would never doubt what fret he was at," he jokes). By 1975, Erlewine

had moved to Big Rapids and opened a new shop, Dan Erlewine's Guitar Hospital. But his biggest innovations were yet to come.

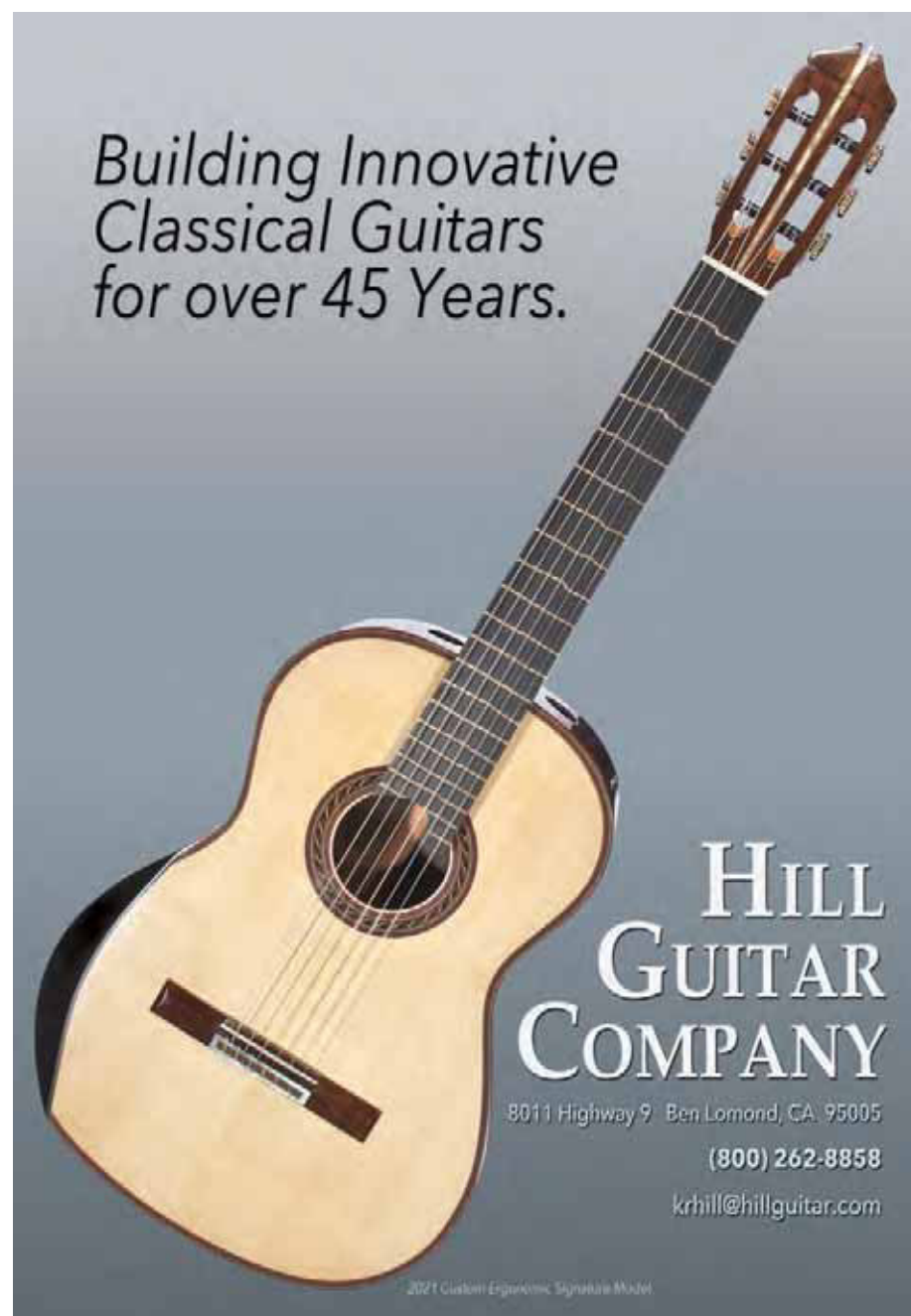
In late 1983, his older brother, Michael, loaned him a video camera: "Make videos of what you do, and you'll always be first in line," Michael told me. "They'll credit you as their teacher and it'll make you famous." He was right." Erlewine went to a NAMM show a few months later, demoing his fret technique at the Dunlop booth, and he arranged to have his Guitar Hospital videotapes, the first of their kind, play on a monitor throughout the day. A few months later, Kix Stewart of StewMac

called to say that he'd seen the videos, and he invited Erlewine to join StewMac in Athens, Ohio. Dan's been there for 37 years.

Six decades after he first began working with guitars, Erlewine says the internet has changed repair tutorials exponentially. He's hopeful about the future, too.

There are so many more resources for aspiring luthiers than there used to be.

That's for sure! With the many books, DVDs, guitar kits, and building/repair schools, it's much easier to learn the trade. When I started, there weren't many luthiers around,



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and those I found wouldn't share what they knew. I had to learn on my own.

Some folks might call you the godfather of guitar repair.

I'm not the godfather. In my generation, the godfathers were Hideo Kamimoto, who wrote *Complete Guitar Repair*; Don Teeter and his two-volume *The Acoustic Guitar: Adjustment, Care, Maintenance and Repair*; as well as Irving Sloane's *Classical Guitar Construction and Guitar Repair: A Manual of Repair for Guitars and Fretted Instruments*, which he researched, wrote, and then photographed in Martin's repair shop. Those guys are my godfathers.

What you think of guitar-building schools?

I tried college twice, and never lasted a whole semester, but I'd have jumped at the chance to go to a guitar-building school. If one can afford it, and spend time away from work or home, it's a wonderful substitute for going to college.

What advice do you have for a luthier who's considering going to school?

Learn all you can before attending a school—it will give you a head start, and you'll be more ready to learn from the outset. The internet is a good place to start. Though I'm sure there are many helpful websites out there, there are two veteran repairmen whose sites I frequent because I learn so much: Frank Ford's frets.com and ianhatesguitars.com, hosted by Ian Davlin.

Some people say the guitar in contemporary culture is passé. What are your feelings on the future of the guitar and guitar repair?

Guitar, passé? No way! I see more guitars being made, sold, played, set up, and repaired today than ever. The world needs guitar makers and repairers, and new generations will go far beyond what came before them. I meet young luthiers who are already raising the bar, and many of them are graduates of luthier schools.

You still play regularly. Do you have a practice routine?

Sixteen or 17 years ago, I started playing every day, and with purpose. I play guitar for at least an hour before dinner. It's not practice—just playing. I pick a key, play a chord, wait until something starts to form, and then go with the flow as unconsciously as possible. Soon, it turns into a melody and the basis for a song.

How did you first get into the Kalamazoo KG-11 that inspired your new collaboration with Adam Buchwald of Iris Guitars?

I repaired one for a special friend around 16 years ago, and I couldn't stop remembering how

The Iris DE-11



COURTESY OF ADAM BUCHWALD/IRIS GUITARS

it felt and sounded. I found one, did the necessary repair and setup, and it was just as good as I'd remembered! I also love the size. I'm not a tall guy, but I've been playing big guitars all my life, and reaching over a jumbo guitar wasn't good for my right shoulder. Hey, short people—play small guitars and you'll last longer.

When did you decide to make your own version of the KG-11?

I'd wanted to for years, and I even cut up some special mahogany to make them. When one of my apprentices, Steve Miller, got a job with Iris Guitars last year, I said, "Hey, why don't you ask if Iris would be interested in making a Dan Erlewine model like the Kalamazoo, with the built-in capos?" His boss, Adam Buchwald, said, "Yeah, man!" I sent out my Kalamazoo, they spec'd it out, made one, sent it back to me, and bingo—we had it.

How does the DE-11 compare to a KG-11?

The DE-11 sounds like a KG-11 made in the same batch on the same day. It has all the punch, warmth, and power I'll ever need. The DE-11 is beautifully made, and the sunburst is perfect; it's done by Dale Fairbanks, a renowned maker of 1930s Gibson-style guitars who joined the Iris team. The finish doesn't use coats of sealer or wood filler, so it's a very thin, hard, beautiful finish that lets a guitar sound "old" or played-in, right out of the case.

The screw-in capo is one of the most distinctive elements of this guitar. How'd you come up with that idea?

Capos have always gotten in the way of my fretting hand. They're clumsy, but necessary for the music I play. After I'd experimented a lot with a clamp-style Hamilton capo and an extension, my longtime shop-mate Elliot John-Conry asked, "Why don't you just screw a capo onto the 'board?" I told him we couldn't do that, and he asked, "Why not?" So, that weekend, we built screw-in capos and put them in an old guitar. I spent a couple years improving the capos until I settled on what I have now.

How do you use them?

Well, it's really a capo that holds down the middle four strings. If I put it at the second fret, I've capoed up a whole step, but the outside E strings aren't capoed—which means I have a D tuning on the bottom (D, A, and D) plus G, B, and D on the top. It's great for playing the blues, folk, country, and rock styles I love. It's kind of like playing with an open tuning, but whenever I play chords I already know, I'm closing the strings, and I'm back in standard

tuning—but with open-string options that wouldn't be available otherwise.

If I want to capo up the neck with the same dropped-string effect, I use a second capo a whole step below. We also make a capo that covers all six strings which doesn't get in the way of your fretting hand. There's no comparison between that and any other mechanical capo; our capo makes it easier to execute anything you're playing in the first position.

How do you attach them?

With a mini Torx screwdriver, which puts the mounting screw flush with the top of the capo, or with a thumbscrew that tightens on top of the capo, which is less awkward and faster.

Have you begun putting them in all your instruments?

All my guitars have my capos. I have a 1939 Gibson J-35, and I put capos in that. I sent wood to Gibson to make a 2001 Les Paul that looked like Bloomfield's, and I put capos in that. I also have two other electric guitars with capos for the blues and country bands that I play in.

Tell me about the elongated neck.

I've always felt cramped playing certain chords in the first position—E, B7, and certain F chords, for example—because the neck transition to the ears of the peghead is so close. I wanted a bit more room, so we let the neck shape keep on going a little farther. Chords that were uncomfortable to the bones of my hand are no longer a problem. You'd have to play one to know.

Do you go back and forth to guitars with and without capos?

Not often, but what I've learned with the drop-capo thing causes me to play new music

without a capo, and sometimes I'm curious to see what comes out.

Do you consider your screw-in capo a replacement for standard capos?

No, because it's not a capo you move around fast, although it's not super slow to change positions, either. It's the unscrewing and re-screwing that might concern live performers. But once they discover the new melodies, chords, and sounds offered by these capos, I think they'll want people to hear it, and I believe they'll develop the necessary "patter" to keep audiences occupied while changing capo positions.

What else would you like to mention about the DE-11?

It comes with my favorite strings, D'Addario Flat Tops Phosphor Bronze light gauge EFT16s, which have a warm, semi-bright sound and hardly any finger/string noise. The Rickard tuners are the finest, most accurate, and easy-to-tune machines I have ever used, and I think they're beautiful. These tuners, first designed by Frank Ford, have cycloidal gears, something that's never been used on a guitar before. The DE-11 is also available left-handed, or with a narrower neck for small hands.

Where do you go from here?

I have the perfect guitar, and I make the best music of my life with it. Along with Adam—Iris, that is—I'm working on an electric guitar with capos, the longer neck, as well as bolt-on replacement necks so players can have an easy way to try the system out. These capos aren't just for acoustic guitars. I bet Keith Richards would have a blast with this neck-mounted on a Tele!

AC

The DE-11's built-in capo system



COURTESY OF DAN ERLEWINE

Low-position frets often show clean little scoops under the plain strings.

Don't Try This at Home

The delicate art of fretwork—and why it's best left to a professional

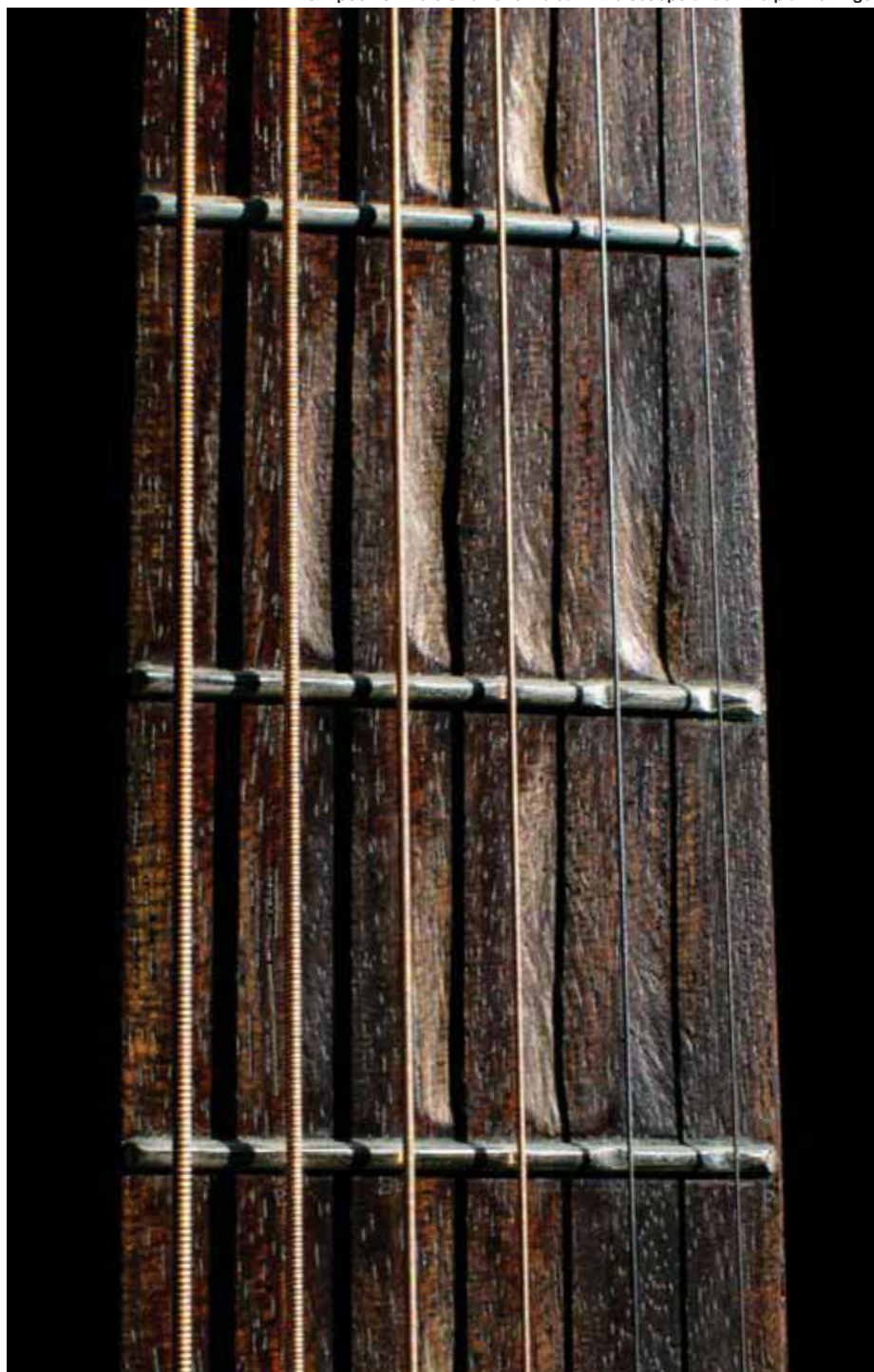
BY MARTIN KEITH

Q: *At what point do you decide that frets have to be replaced? What are some guidelines you can share with AG readers regarding frets? What are the consequences of playing a guitar with frets that are too worn? Can frets be easily replaced by the owner, or should that be left to a luthier during normal setup maintenance? Is it difficult to dress frets? Your insight is greatly appreciated.*

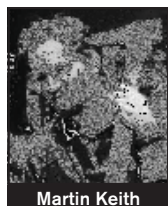
—Art Bouthot

A: Thanks for the questions—this is a great subject. Fretwork is perhaps the most common job in the guitar repair shop. Whether building an instrument from scratch, restoring a vintage collector's item, or simply setting up a brand-new entry-level guitar, it's likely that some amount of fretwork will be required.

When an instrument's frets are worn, a few undesirable things can result. The first and most obvious is buzzing notes in certain positions. Since very few of us play every note on the guitar equally often, certain frets, typically 1–5, usually get worn out faster than the rest.



BILL EVANS



Martin Keith

GOT A QUESTION?

Uncertain about guitar care and maintenance? The ins-and-outs of guitar building? Or another topic related to your gear? Ask *Acoustic Guitar's* repair expert Martin Keith by sending an email titled "Repair Expert" to Editors.AG@stringletter.com and we'll forward it to Keith.



If AG selects your question for publication, you'll receive a complimentary copy of AG's *Acoustic Guitar Owner's Manual*.

For the guitar to play cleanly without buzzes, the tops of the frets must be perfectly level from one to the next. As some get worn away, they end up lower than their nearby neighbors that get less action. Buzzes are the inevitable result. The small divots in worn frets can also make it difficult to bend notes smoothly.

Another problem with worn frets is intonation. The fret scale is carefully laid out and cut to precisely place the center of each fret in the correct position. A difference of a mere ten thousandths of an inch (the thickness of a .010 plain string) can result in an audibly out-of-tune note. As the fret wears, the original rounded crown shape changes to a flat plateau, and the ringing point of the string shifts forward to the front edge of that surface. On larger frets with noticeable wear, this can mean a change of .030 inches or so—more than enough to cause intonation problems for anyone with a well-tuned ear. For this reason, fret tops have to be carefully refiled to an even crown after any leveling.

Why does this wear happen? Traditional fretwire is made from nickel silver, which is a mix of copper and nickel (there is no actual silver in the alloy). Strings are made of a mix of alloys—steel, phosphor bronze, and nickel, to name a few. Steel is harder than nickel silver and will eventually win the battle every time. However, even with bronze and other wrap materials whose hardness is a closer match to the frets themselves, the abrasive texture of the wraps will still grind away at the frets pretty effectively. This is why the low-position frets often show clean little scoops under the plain strings, and grooved ridges of wear under the lower strings.

Surprisingly, in some cases the wear pattern can be even enough across nearby frets that they will not buzz despite considerable loss of fret material. I have seen a number of guitars with frets that looked nearly worn through, but still played without noticeable buzzes. For this reason, I generally take a conservative approach to fret work, and only suggest it if the player is experiencing some problem. If there are no buzzes and the action and intonation are reasonable, then I don't generally suggest a refret or leveling.

In the last decade or so, manufacturers have introduced a couple of new fretwire alloys that are gaining in popularity. Stainless steel fretwire is substantially harder than traditional wire and has been proven to resist wear much better. It is harder to work with and more time-consuming to install, so many luthiers charge a premium for it. Opinions vary among luthiers and players about whether the fret alloy makes a noticeable difference in the tone of the instrument. Some

swear that stainless steel imparts a brighter, slightly more metallic tone, while others say that they hear no difference at all.

Another recent arrival to the scene is EVO gold fretwire, named for its distinctive golden color. This alloy was originally developed as a hypoallergenic metal for medical purposes, but has found its place as a good alternative to nickel silver for frets. Its hardness and wear-resistance lie right between nickel silver and stainless, which make it a good compromise of performance and ease of installation.

Now, to the latter part of your question. Though I generally encourage players to take a hands-on approach to adjustment and maintenance, I would recommend caution when it comes to fretwork. Most fret maintenance is a one-way street: You can only *remove* material, and a little bit of grinding can go a long way.

The fret scale is carefully laid out and cut to precisely place the center of each fret in the correct position. A difference of a mere ten thousandths of an inch (the thickness of a .010 plain string) can result in an audibly out-of-tune note.

The first important step is simply diagnosing the problem—if you have a buzzing fret, it could be for a number of reasons: a low nut slot, a high or loose fret, a low fret, incorrect neck relief, and so on. Filing down a buzz is the right solution in some cases, but can actually cause more problems in other cases. Experienced luthiers know that fret leveling is typically the very last part of a setup/adjustment, after all other potential causes of fret buzz have been eliminated.

Refretting an instrument has its own set of potential pitfalls. Removing old worn frets can be terribly destructive to a fingerboard if not done carefully. I've seen otherwise pristine vintage guitars with horribly chipped up fingerboards from bad refrets. Frets are sometimes simply pressed or glued in, and in some cases, such as vintage Fenders, they were even

driven in sideways from the edge of the fingerboard. Knowing how to approach each case will greatly reduce the chance of nasty cosmetic damage. (Sidenote: my cellphone autocorrects “refret” to “regret”, which is sometimes quite appropriate.)

After removing the old frets, a critical step is the preparation of the fretboard surface. Quite often, this needs to be sanded back to a smooth, flat plane. Divots from fingernails can be filled or sanded out, and the fret slots need to be cleaned out and sometimes deepened. If the fingerboard has inlays, this can sometimes be a touchy process—sanding through a pearl inlay is not fun!

The slots themselves are another area where a few thousandths of an inch can really matter. A fret that is designed for a .023-inch-wide slot will feel really tight in a .021-inch slot, and forcing the issue can result in a back-bowed neck. (Consider this: the tiny difference of .002 inches per slot multiplies by 20 slots to .040 inches—quite a bit of extra material to force into the face of a fingerboard.) Clever repair techs sometimes use this compression fretting technique to their advantage to correct bowed necks on vintage guitars without truss rods, but when it's done accidentally, it can cause real issues. An experienced builder will be familiar with the feel of a well-matched fret and slot and will know if the fret is too tight or too loose.

Bound fingerboards require an additional few steps. The tang of the fret (the barbed portion which fits into the slot) needs to be cut or filed back from each end, so the bead (the visible part of the installed fret) can lap over the binding. This takes time and some specialized tools (flush ground cutters, files, and usually some magnifying viewers).

Finally, nearly every refret involves adjustments to the nut slots, and, more often than not, this means a new nut. Nut slots wear down, and often have been lowered following prior fretwork. Fresh frets usually end up higher than old worn ones, and this can mean the nut slots are all suddenly too low.

With all this in mind, I recommend finding a local luthier to do your fretwork. This is bread-and-butter work for any guitar tech, and a reasonable hourly rate is a small price to pay for the accumulated experience and specialized tools needed to do a successful job. A good fret job makes a tremendous difference in feel, tone, and playability, and will feel worthwhile every time you pick up the guitar.

Martin Keith is a luthier, repair and restoration expert, and working musician based in Woodstock, New York. martinkeithguitars.com

Cole Clark AN2EC- BLBL-HUM

The Australian maker delivers a guitar with brilliant acoustic and electric tones

BY MATT BLACKETT

To quote the illustrious players of Monty Python, “And now for something completely different.” Well, maybe not completely. We’ve seen variations on the hybrid acoustic/electric for ages. Some, like the Taylor T5, came at it from the “acoustic guitar with an electric pickup” angle. Many others have approached the problem by slapping a piezo bridge on an otherwise standard-issue electric guitar.

All designs have yielded musical results in the hands of skilled players, but has any manufacturer truly nailed a great acoustic tone and a great electric tone in the same instrument? Well, our fine Aussie friends at Cole Clark guitars would have you believe that yes, someone has indeed cracked that code, and it’s

SPECS

BODY Cutaway grand auditorium; AA-grade Australian blackwood top, back, and sides; river she-oak bridge with Graph Tech Tusq saddle; natural satin nitrocellulose lacquer finish

NECK Queensland maple; 25.5"-scale river she-oak fretboard with 12" radius; 1.73" Graph Tech Tusq nut; 20 frets (14 to body); natural satin nitrocellulose lacquer finish

OTHER Cole Clark three-way pickup system; Lollar Imperial humbucker (with separate output and tone/volume controls; series/parallel switchable on tone control); Grover tuners; Elixir Nanoweb Phosphor Bronze strings (.012–.053); Cole Clark tweed hardshell case

MADE IN Australia

PRICE \$2,899 street
coleclarkguitars.com





them. A lofty claim, to be sure, but they put their money where their mouth is and sent me the AN2EC-BLBL-HUM that you see here. If that name doesn't roll off your tongue, you can call this grand auditorium-sized beauty Angel (as designated by the AN).

You can tell at a glance that this Angel is a different breed of guitar, but before we talk about what this instrument is, let's talk about what it's not. By design, Cole Clark did not set out to build a guitar that would compete—in tone or volume—with a traditional acoustic in the same room. Instead, they conceived, designed, and built this guitar to be the best-sounding *amplified* acoustic you've ever heard. (Remember that lofty descriptor from before?) That means the bracing, electronics, and overall construction are done with the amplified (or direct, in the studio) sound in mind. OK.

There's more. You might have noticed that there is a Lollar humbucker nestled in the bridge position of the Angel. To make that work, Cole Clark needed to further stiffen up the construction of the guitar, presumably sacrificing even more acoustic tone in the pursuit of an acoustic-electric that might not even be possible. Is there no end to their madness?

IN THE CROSSOVER MATRIX

I wasn't expecting much sonically when I first strummed the Angel—although from a visual standpoint I was very impressed with the gorgeous (and sustainably sourced) Australian Blackwood top, back, and sides. So I hit a chord, and the fact is I immediately loved the acoustic tone of this guitar. No, it's not a cannon like a D-28, but it's sparkly and resonant and has great sustain. I actually had tons of fun playing the Angel before I ever plugged it in. The neck is fast and comfortable, with a flat 12-inch radius that makes lead lines fun and easy and an overall solidity that makes me feel like I can hit it as hard as I want, which I did.

But if the whole idea here is to create an amazing amplified sound, I knew I had to try that. Like all Cole Clark guitars, the Angel features a three-way acoustic pickup system that consists of an undersaddle piezo, a face sensor for picking up the sound of the top, and a condenser mic. Seems logical enough, but where Cole Clark really excels is in the crossover matrix that allows each of these elements play to its respective strength.

Essentially, the piezo handles the lows, and only the lows, with attack and immediacy. That means this piezo won't see or reproduce any of the frequencies that bring about the ping and splatter of a piezo gone wrong. The mids then go to the face sensor, but with none of the

frequencies that can make a top go into gig-ruining feedback. The microphone only deals with highs, and even then only above its feedback zone, so you get top-end zing without squeal. It's like you have the world's greatest sound engineer living inside your guitar. When you're done dialing all that in, there is a three-band EQ to tweak the overall tone. Wow.

NO PING, NO QUACK

Then there's the whole humbucker thing. This guitar has a specially voiced Lollar in the bridge position, with a separate output jack, volume and tone controls, and a three-position mini toggle right on the top of the guitar to select acoustic, humbucker, or both. Some people don't like seeing volume and tone knobs on an acoustic guitar and I have two words for them: John Freaking Lennon.

They told me I could get all this working and sounding great with no fuss. I am somewhat cynical, so I didn't believe it one bit, despite the undeniably friendly and trustworthy

It's like you have the world's greatest sound engineer living inside your guitar.

attitude of the Cole Clark people. But I set up a rig where I sent the 1/4-inch acoustic signal to a Tascam US 20x20 interface into a pair of KRK V6 powered monitors, and the humbucker's output went to a Kemper PowerHead feeding a 2x12 cab loaded with Celestion Greenbacks.

I strummed a chord on the purely acoustic side, with all the controls at noon, and all EQ flat. And it sounded amazing. No ping, no quack. A pleasant, musical, *forgiving* acoustic tone. I played around with the controls and heard what they brought, but I swear, after hours of testing, my favorite amplified acoustic tone on this guitar was with every control straight up. I don't think that's ever happened in 40 years of testing gear. Color me impressed.

I did some recording, tracking the Angel direct, and I was truly pleased with the results, which were very musical- and professional-sounding. The guitar sat in the mix beautifully, and I didn't feel the need for a traditional miked acoustic at all. So, Cole Clark delivered on their promise, but I knew my work was not done. There was that humbucker.

I wasn't sure how an electric guitar pickup would deal with acoustic guitar strings, but

this pickup works just as you would expect and sounds awesome. It provides crunch and bite that really doesn't seem possible from an acoustic guitar. Through my Kemper, the tones sounded perfectly electric, maybe in a Gibson ES-335 kind of way, and never in that hollow, creepy, "I plugged an acoustic into my high-gain amp" kind of way. Rather than offer the option of splitting the coils (which I've always thought was overrated) Cole Clark lets you go from series to parallel operation on the humbucker's coils by pulling up on the tone control, for a super-cool and very useable additional sound.

I must concede that the .012-.053 strings that the Angel shipped with are a little too beefy for me to truly do my electric-guitar thing with—particularly bends on that wound G. But there's no denying that it rocks, and I can crank out big riffs with abandon. When they feed back—and they do—the feedback is musical and controllable.

I've never been a fan of blending acoustic and electric tones on instruments such as this, but I have to admit that I got a bunch of great sounds in the middle position, with a big acoustic tone on one side and a Vox AC30 cleanish pop tone on the other. Even high-gain tones were blendable with the acoustic timbres by judiciously riding the volume knob and dialing in as much rock as I needed. I'm not a big looping guy, but I assume that loopers would love this guitar for laying down a beautiful acoustic bed and then burning on the humbucker, or conversely layering dense, droning electric lines and then floating over the top with sparkly acoustic parts.

ACHIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE

I'm not sure anyone has done what Cole Clark accomplished with this fine guitar. It's obviously not for everyone. It can't do everything that a classic dreadnought or a meat-and-potatoes electric can do, and they candidly acknowledge that. You want to play in your living room with a huge acoustic sound? There are lots of fine manufacturers who can help you. But if you want to play in a coffeehouse, or alongside a loud band, or record direct, or do all those things with the option of adding in amazing electric tones (courtesy of a boutique pickup!), with killer tone, controllable feedback, and eco-friendly sustainable woods, well, I'm gonna suggest you look Down Under. Congrats, Cole Clark. You might just have a unicorn on your hands. And to anyone who says, "That's impossible!" I was once like you. I encourage you to plug in a Cole Clark guitar and see for yourself.

AC

Córdoba Fusion 5

A crossover acoustic-electric nylon-string that won't break the bank

BY NICK MILLEVOI

Classical guitar is an exceptionally rich tradition that requires a lifetime of patient dedication and study to master. Anyone who's tried to take their steel-string skills and apply them to a nylon-string knows that the difference in playing technique and instrument design can be a serious barrier to entry, let alone the deep and detail-oriented repertoire you'll face.

But none of that means that a steel-string player can't have a little fun with a nylon-string. Chet Atkins, the masterful technician that he was, pioneered virtuosic nylon-string playing from a non-classical background, and

For players looking for an entry into the nylon-string world, the Fusion 5 is a great utility guitar with none of the commitment that comes with a high-end instrument.

plenty of folk strummers have been drawn by the allure of the nylon's softer tone. For those wanting to add some nylon-string flavors to their sound, crossover guitars make the leap from steel-string a little bit easier, and the new Córdoba Fusion 5 is a great option that's affordable and fun to play.

EASY TRANSITION

The Fusion 5 comes in a variety of colors, including our test model's limited-edition Jet Black finish, which would surely look more at home amidst a rock band's acoustic set than on the classical recital stage. Black tuners and a small pearl headstock decal play up the guitar's finish and give an elegant and understated look, while a pearl rosette decal and composite off-white body and fretboard binding offer a nice contrast. Córdoba has undoubtedly focused on the things that matter most for sound and play-





ability, so some of the finer details, like the fretboard markers on this demo model, are a little sloppy, but they still get the job done, so it's a minor grievance.

Picking up the guitar, it feels distinctly different than a steel-string. But it's certainly a soft transition, made easier by the guitar's 16-inch radius, which is noticeably more forgiving than the flat fingerboard of a classical instrument. At 1-7/8 inches, the nut is slightly narrower than on a standard classical guitar, making it hospitable to players accustomed to the tighter quarters of most steel-strings. Another key crossover characteristic of the Fusion 5 is its cutaway, which allows for easy access to all frets.

I found it very comfortable to hold the Fusion 5, as its lower bout of 14-5/8 inches is comparable to that of a standard classical guitar. Whether opting for the common right-leg position or supporting it classical-style with the left leg, it's easy to keep snug and secure, and its compact size makes it an ideal couch guitar.

A PLAYER'S GUITAR

As a guitarist who likes high-end instruments, I can definitely appreciate a luthier-made classical guitar, but as a non-classically trained player, I feel as though I have no business on a professional classical guitar. Playing the Fusion 5 checks all my nylon-string guitar boxes: I can do my best imitation of a classical player, pull off some flamenco-esque



SPECS

BODY Fusion body style with fan-braced solid spruce top and mahogany back and sides; Natural, Sonata Burst, or Jet Black polyurethane finish; composite binding; pearl-style rosette decal

NECK Three-piece mahogany neck; 25.6" scale-length; pau ferro fretboard with 16" radius; 1-7/8" bone nut; silver tuning machines with black buttons

OTHER Pau ferro bridge with bone saddle; Fishman Sonitone electronics; Savarez Cristal Corum 500CJ High Tension strings

MADE IN China

PRICE \$469 street (Jet Black, Sonata Burst); \$429 for Natural finish

cordobaguitars.com

moves, easily play some fast scalar runs, and get into a Chet Atkins vibe.

The notes across the fretboard have an even sound and playability. It's not the rich, resonant sound and feel of a high-end instrument that seems to sing with every note, but rather a simple, midrange-focused tone that is easy to play all along the guitar's pau ferro fretboard. That's not a bad thing though—it does the job well enough to give me what I'm looking for on a nylon-string guitar without the imposter syndrome that goes along with playing a Van Halen lick on a fine concert instrument. For that reason alone, I feel as though the Fusion 5 is a nylon-string that is exactly my speed.

READY FOR THE STUDIO OR THE STAGE

I've used the Fusion 5 on a few recordings in my home studio and it has been fitting nicely into the mix, definitely making the case that I should have a nylon-string guitar around for the occasional recording project. At less than \$500, the Fusion 5 fits the bill. It's well made

and functional enough to be used on a professional recording, but not so expensive that I have to baby it.

The Fusion 5 comes equipped with a Fishman Sonitone pickup. These electronics are discreet, with only an output jack and access to the battery compartment, so there are no knobs or other controls on the guitar. I didn't miss the controls when dialing in a tone during some direct recording, and I'm sure outboard tone controls would work great in live performance as well.

THE BOTTOM LINE

For players looking for an entry into the nylon-string world, the Fusion 5 is a great utility guitar with none of the commitment that comes with a high-end instrument. It would be a great addition to the collection of any recording guitarist looking to add some nylon tones to their work, or any player who just wants to have fun with nylon-string guitar and doesn't plan on dedicating themselves to classical playing.

AC



Mojotone Quiet Coil NC-1

A magnetic soundhole pickup that avoids common pitfalls

BY DOUG YOUNG

Magnetic soundhole pickups have a lot of positive attributes: easy installation, feedback resistance, and a lack of the dreaded quack sounds that occur with the more common undersaddle pickups. On the other hand, magnetic pickups usually sound more electric than acoustic and are susceptible to noise from electronic interference. Many soundhole pickups are heavy and need to be clamped tightly across the soundhole, which can affect the acoustic tone of the guitar.

Mojotone, a company based in Burgaw, North Carolina, has introduced a model designed to rectify the common issues with magnetic pickups, while maintaining their advantages. The Quiet Coil NC-1 (\$189.95 street) is a handmade single-coil active pickup

that incorporates noise-reduction technology with an extended frequency response for a more natural, less electric tone. The company states that its goal is to match the sound of a condenser microphone.

The pickup is powered by a pair of common CR2032 batteries, which are predicted to last for 500 hours of playing time. The NC-1 features a battery test button as well as a small volume control on the body of the pickup. Installation is easy—the unit is small enough that I was able to temporarily install it in a Martin OM without even loosening the strings. The Quiet Coil is exceptionally lightweight (under 1.6 ounces) and uses cork pads that should be safe for most finishes.

I explored the Quiet Coil by playing through several amps, and, because the company suggests the pickup could substitute for a mic in the studio, I also recorded the pickup directly and listened over monitors. The tone is unique, with prominent higher frequencies, a sense of ambience, and less electric-guitar color than expected. It's difficult for any pickup to compete with a well-miked guitar, but the sound was quite natural, balanced, and acoustic-sounding. It was a little surprising to not hear the typical magnetic big bass response, but a little EQ easily adds additional low end and warmth.

If you've been tempted by magnetic pickups but felt they sounded too electric, the Mojotone Quiet Coil NC-1 might be what you are looking for. mojotone.com

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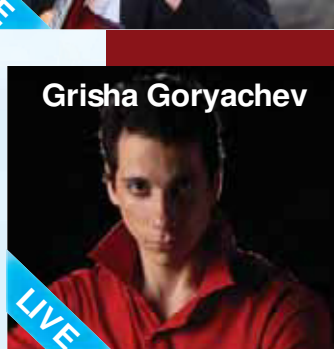
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Augustine Imperial and Regal Strings

Relaunched sets celebrate nylon string maker's colorful past

BY MARK SMALL

The late 1940s saw a major advancement in classical guitar strings when World War II restrictions caused Albert Augustine and Andrés Segovia to pioneer nylon sets—an innovative leap from gut strings toward reliability, tone, and improved intonation. The company still produces the “Classic” monofilament nylon Blue, Red, Black, and Gold lines of strings that built its reputation.

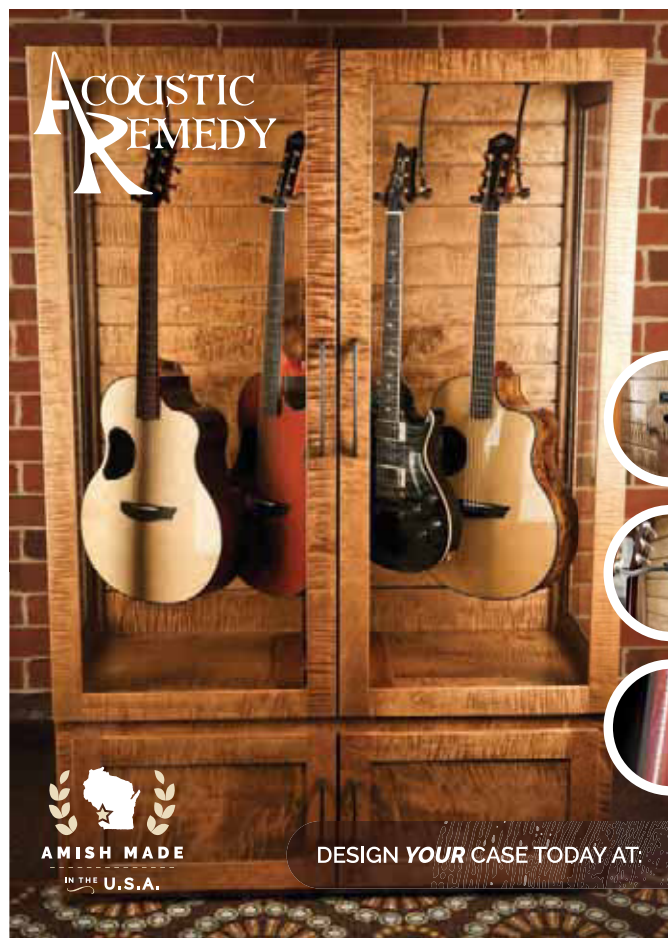
Augustine Strings has relaunched the premium Imperial and Regal classical guitar lines with new packaging to enable guitarists to easily identify which of the four sets will best serve them. The core products, utilizing Augustine’s special Crystal Nylon treble strings and silver-plated basses, have been available for 20 years. Colorful new packaging makes it clearer that the Regal line (\$9.99) features its high-tension trebles paired with high-tension basses or in a hybrid set with medium basses. Alternately, the Imperials (\$9.99) offer their medium-tension trebles paired with medium basses or in a mix with high-tension basses.

Typically, I find a brand and gauge of strings and stick with them for years. Trying these sets on two of my instruments stirred me from complacency. Stringing my Pepe Romero, Jr. cedar-top guitar (660mm neck scale) with the Imperial hybrid (medium trebles, high basses) energized it. Each treble string is merely 0.01mm greater in diameter than my former strings, but produces a



different feel, timbre, and sustain. They’re powerful and sensitive to vibrato. The high-tension basses are between 0.02mm and 0.05mm heavier (from fourth to sixth strings) and provide depth and a secure feel. The Regals likewise enlivened my Antonio Loriente spruce-top (650mm). augustinestings.com

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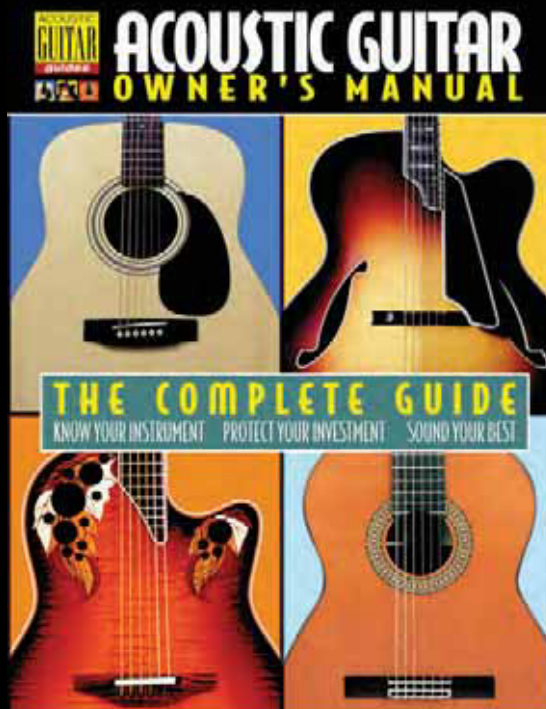
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PLAYLIST



Chris Pierce
American Silence
(Pierce Records)

MATHIEU BITTON

Singing for the Oppressed and Dispossessed

Chris Pierce writes incisive protest songs for today

BY PAT MORAN

Wielding his guitar like a weapon, Chris Pierce sings truth to power on his eighth album, *American Silence*. With gruff vocals, warbling harmonica, and sturdy, stripped-down playing on his Gibson J-50 and Martin D-18, the soulful Black artist harkens back to the acoustic guitarists and protest singers of the civil rights era. Though he never loses his identity, Pierce's voice becomes multitudes on this collection, attempting to speak out for those unheard in 21st century America.

Pierce's picking—rippling like water over rocks—is deceptively gentle throughout “Sound All the Bells,” even as the lyrics turn to Pierce's childhood terror of watching a cross-burning in front of his home. His Martin swaggers with a locomotive chug on “Chain Gang Fourth of July.” Amid percussive swipes across the strings, Pierce becomes a prophet preaching from the pulpit, asserting that slavery still reigns in prisons across America, while white-collar criminals go free.

On “Residential School,” Pierce's husky whisper assumes the persona of a 19th century Native American, shipped off to a white-run institution designed to bleach his culture and identity out of him. As chiming guitar sweeps like wind through the pines, Pierce imagines ancestors rising above the prairie, but the sound he hears is just a locomotive whistling through the night.

“How Can Anybody Be Okay with This” is a blunt condemnation of what he sees as America's slow awakening to police brutality against Black bodies. As Pierce's ringing strums grow more insistent, he subverts the National Anthem: “Oh say, can you see/What you don't want to believe?” Pierce's pulsing Gibson turns ominous on “It's Been Burning for a While.” Here, an apocalyptic nightmare builds to a wave of righteous fury unleashed over the death of George Floyd and countless other Black men. Pierce's powerful growl builds until the dam breaks with a hair-raising primal scream: “That ain't no chip up on my

shoulder/That's your boot up on my neck.”

Soulful, wise, and empathetic, Pierce is not afraid to make some listeners uncomfortable with *American Silence*, but the album also has its gentler moments. Pierce shares the sorrow welling in his heart as the homeless huddle for warmth in “Bring the Old Man Home.” He marvels at the courage of civil rights hero John Lewis in “The Bridge of John,” and delivers a paean to Black self-love in “Young Black and Beautiful.”

The title track praises the healing balm of song with the couplet, “We see the music move you as you lay your burden down/We feel the music grip you as your heart is soaked in sound.” As Pierce's vocal is joined by a swelling choir, he makes an impassioned plea to Americans to overcome crippling complacency to save the country we profess to love. Pierce spins narratives weighted with emotion born from struggle. His songs of freedom may recall the 1960s, but his concerns are up-to-the-minute and his eyes are on the future.



M. Ward
Think of Spring
 (Anti)

A stripped-down take on a classic Billie Holiday album

It's a great concept for pandemic art: Take Billie Holiday's *Lady in Satin* (1958), the last album the legendary jazz vocalist released before dying, and recreate it at home. How? If you're Matt Ward, instead of using a 40-piece orchestra, you grab an acoustic guitar and a handful of open tunings. Instead of booking Columbia Records' best studio, you overdub yourself on an analog Tascam four-track. Instead of reaching for commercial success, you'll sing with whatever voice you have—even if, like Holiday's, it's not very pretty.

These aren't sad songs, but Holiday knew how to find the melancholy in couplets like, "For all we know, we may never meet again/ Before you go, make this moment sweet again." Ward knows it too, which gives his "For All We Know" a special sense of fragility, letting his guitar lag slightly behind the beat and asking his voice to reach notes that are almost beyond his range. In a simple, barely sketched arrangement, he strums with a percussive snap, slowing down and speeding up, and doesn't start his solo until the last 30 seconds, as if there's nothing left to be said.

For the achingly sad/sweet "But Beautiful," Ward sets the rhythm with a short, plaintive series of upbeats, plucking one or two strings at a time, shifting slightly to imply a new chord, and bravely soldiering through a series of unexpected notes, as if unsure whether love is good or bad. Through it all, his voice is a growl, a cry, a promise, a prayer—it's a masterfully vulnerable, elegantly rough, and timeless performance.

—Kenny Berkowitz



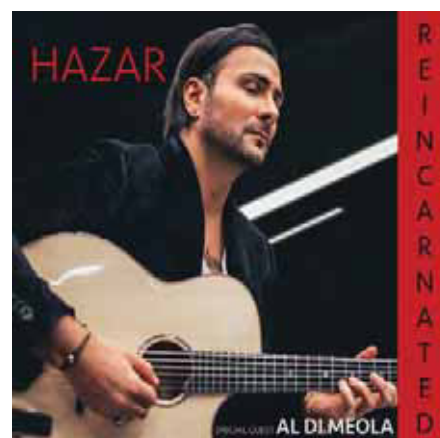
Suzzy Roche & Lucy Wainwright Roche
I Can Still Hear You
 (StorySound Records)

Sublime folk album from mother, daughter, and friends

I will freely admit that I have not faithfully kept up with every twist and turn of the endlessly creative and fecund Roche-Wainwright-McGarrigle intertwined families musical saga. But I basically love them all, and when I do check in from time to time, I'm invariably charmed, delighted and, quite often, moved. This release from Suzzy Roche (one of the three Roche sisters) and her daughter, Lucy Wainwright Roche (her father is Loudon Wainwright III), feels like a Roches album, with its tight and distinctive harmonies, plaintive lead vocals, shimmering acoustic guitar underpinnings, and songs that range from finely observed character sketches to plainspoken yet still poetic introspective musings to quirky tunes like "Swan Duck Song." Suzzy has five excellent songs here, Lucy one solo-write (the affecting title track), and one with her mom ("Get the Better"). Cover songs include Joe Raposo's always-welcome "Bein' Green"; a wispy, mysterious number from the late Maggie Roche, "Jane"; a lovely portrait of loneliness and inner strength by Elizabeth Converse called "Talkin' Like You (Two Tall Mountains)," and the heartbreaking traditional Irish tune "Factory Girl."

Recorded in isolation during the Winter 2020 pandemic shutdown in NYC, this warm, smart, impeccably recorded and produced album (by Jordan Harris), features acoustic guitar contributions from both principals (Suzzy also plays tasteful electric), man-who-plays-everything Jordan Harris, and Emily Saliers (of Indigo Girls; she and her IG partner, Amy Ray, both sing on the album, too). This is modern folk music filled with imagination, heart, and soulful ruminations.

—Blair Jackson



Hazar
Reincarnated
 (Immersive Audio Network)

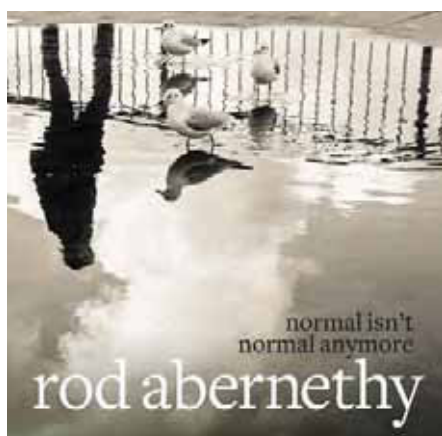
Virtuosity and melody are showcased on eclectic set

He has been compared favorably to the legendary Paco de Lucía and is an acolyte of Al Di Meola, who makes a guest appearance on a spirited cover of the late Chick Corea's classic "Spain." Having emerged as an expert player of the lute-like Persian Saz, the Germany-based Hazar switched to acoustic guitar on the advice of John McLaughlin, with whom he had shared the stage. "I had nothing more to tell with the saz," he said in a 2020 *Jazziz* interview. He clearly has plenty to say with the acoustic guitar. His virtuosity and acute sense of melody are prevalent throughout this nine-track album.

While Hazar is never short of flash, it is on such ballads as his eight-minute cover of Brazilian composer and guitarist Luiz Bonfá's soft samba "Black Orpheus" that Hazar displays his command of lyricism. That quality, as well as a certain playfulness, is also apparent in his tender reading of George Gershwin's "Summertime." He adds Middle Eastern drumming to Biréli Lagrène's Gypsy-jazz tribute "Made in France," and his love for the beauty of Roma music is apparent in his captivating cover of the traditional tune "Le Vieux Tzigane." Conversely, Hazar is just as comfortable with bebop, as evidenced by his joyful rendering of Charlie Parker's "Donna Lee."

While these tunes are played exquisitely, the sonics on *Reincarnated* also are spotlighted: The tracks were expertly recorded at Bauer Studios in Ludwigsburg, Germany (mastered at Abbey Road in London), and this two-disc set includes a Blu-ray featuring multiple hi-definition formats.

—Greg Cahill



Rod Abernethy

Normal Isn't Normal Anymore

(Self-released)

Revealing autobiographical tales and more

It's fitting that North Carolina troubadour, guitarist, and storyteller Rod Abernethy tells a story about the guitar he plays throughout *Normal Isn't Normal Anymore*. When he graduated from college, Abernethy's mother gifted him any guitar he wanted, as long as he promised to never sell it. The search for the perfect instrument took years, until a stranger at a rural gas station said he had a guitar for sale. Abernethy followed the stranger home, wondering if he would be murdered. Instead, he scored a 1945 Gibson J-200.

That evocative, homespun story could fit snugly between any of the dozen narratives here, like the gentle "My Father Was a Quiet Man," in which Abernethy's dream reveals his old man's heretofore unknown strength; or the slinky and funky "When Tobacco Was King," where Abernethy remembers being sold the lie that smoking was a teenage rite of passage. Coiling percussive picking on the Gibson is shadowed by Will Kimbrough's decaying electric guitar fills on the tile track, a mordant reflection on today's "Wi-Fi world."

Abernethy's 1961 Fender Stratocaster provides the ghostly electric grace notes on "Another Year." Here the singer-songwriter's rippling picking and weathered tenor follow five lives—a homeless woman, a handicapped veteran, a couple crippled by medical debt, and an immigrant crossing the border—and finds that we're all the same under the skin.

If Abernethy's sensitive stories share a theme, it can be found in the meditative "Changing," where the award-winning guitarist admits he can't stop stumbling, striving, and growing. —PM



Gaëlle Solal

Tuhu

(Eudora)

French guitarist's tribute to Villa-Lobos

The great French classical guitarist Gaëlle Solal has been obsessed with Brazilian music (among various other styles) since being part of a festival dedicated to composer Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887–1959) in 2009, and then making a subsequent trip to Brazil. The sweet fruit of that obsession is this remarkable and inspiring 15-track album featuring works by Villa-Lobos, as well as "pieces by other composers who either had an influence on or were influenced by his music," Solal writes in the liner notes. Villa-Lobos has been trendy in classical guitar circles for years—rare is the guitarist who *doesn't* include a work or two in her or his repertoire—and with good reason: the composer's writing seamlessly blended strains of various Brazilian folk music forms with sophisticated, classically influenced structures and ideas.

He was a master of melody, harmony, and rhythm. Solal's brilliant album offers seven Villa-Lobos works—including popular selections such as "Chôros No. 1," two parts of the *Suite Populaire Brésilienne*, the much-played (but wonderful) "Prelude No. 2," and "Modinha"—and surrounds them with stellar, well-known works by Brazilians like Pixinguinha, Egberto Gismonti, Guinga, Antônio Carlos Jobim, and Garoto; plus two Villa-Lobos-inspired works by the late classical/jazz giant Roland Dyens (Solal's teacher and friend) rounding out the collection with characteristic verve and zest. Solal's playing, on a Rondine guitar made by the Belgian luthiers Walter Verreydt and Martina Gozzini, is faultless throughout, and the repertoire—heavy on the ballad side—manages to be both crowd-pleasing and somehow perfect. A real gem! —BJ



Vivian Leva & Riley Calcagno

Vivian Leva & Riley Calcagno

(Free Dirt)

Young duo digs deep into its country and old-time roots

In the three years since Vivian Leva's debut, *Time is Everything*, her writing has grown sharper, Riley Calcagno's playing has grown richer, and with this second album, they've officially become a duo. Both have been steeped in Appalachian music for as long as they've been alive—Leva's parents are the great Carol Elizabeth Jones and James Leva, and Calcagno's father is a multi-instrumentalist in Seattle's old-time scene—and each comes to this music with a determination to dig deep.

"Will you still love me when I tear your heart away," Leva sings in the opening track, "Will You," strumming a boom-chuck rhythm as Calcagno comes close behind, singing a Stanley Brothers-inspired harmony, adding a double-stop solo on fiddle, and playing a rolling, reassuring response on six-string. It's the perfect cheating song, with Chris Stafford (pedal steel) wailing quietly in the background, while Trey Boudreaux (bass) and Matty Meyer (drums) keep time in classic country style, fitting their sound snugly between a 2020 back porch and a 1950s Kitty Wells recording session.

More drama follows, just like it's supposed to. In "Leaving on Our Minds," Leva and Calcagno commit to a lifetime of walking the line between staying together and falling apart. In "Love and Chains," they watch the sun fade, pretending love isn't really running out, and hoping the next morning's cup of coffee will make everything better. On "Good and Gone," they close the album with one last stand, knowing all the miles won't keep them apart and managing to hit the tear-stained sweet spot of country heartache. —KB

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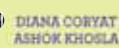
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mendocinoguitarworkshop.com 81

Armadillo Enterprises

lunaguitars.com 17

Black Mountain Picks

blackmountainpicks.com 50

Bread & Roses

breadandroses.org 81

C.F. Martin & Co., Inc.

martinguitar.com 84

Centrum Foundation

centrum.org 47

Collings Guitars

collingsguitars.com 7

Elixir Strings

elixirstrings.com 8, 31

Fender Musical Instruments Corporation

fender.com 12-13

G7th Ltd.

g7th.com 39

Gibson Montana

gibson.com 2

Guild Guitars

guildguitars.com 4

Guitar Foundation of America

guitarfoundation.org 75

Hill Guitar Company, Inc.

hillguitar.com 65

Honz Technology, LLC

tonewoodamp.com 16

Jewitt Guitars

jewittguitars.com 77

Mojotone

mojotone.com 59

Paul Reed Smith Guitars

prsguitars.com 3

Phoenix Guitar Company

phoenixguitarco.com 50

RainSong Graphite Guitars

rainsong.com 9

Roberto-Venn School of Luthiery

roberto-venn.com 77

Shubb Capos

shubb.com 47

Solid Ground Stands

solidgroundstands.com 77

Strings by Mail

stringsbymail.com 41, 47

Sweetwater Sound

sweetwater.com 15

USA Songwriting Competition

songwriting.net 51

2020 Collings OM3 Alaskan

Strikingly colored reclaimed Sitka spruce inspires a special series of guitars

BY GREG OLWELL

Guitars are often playable art objects used to tell stories. And sometimes when an instrument is built using unique materials, it comes with a backstory built deep into its woodgrain. Take the new Collings OM3 Alaskan seen here. It's one of six guitars made for the shop's premier dealers using a combination of unusually colored Sitka spruce, curly mahogany, and special appointments. (The other models include dreadnought, 000 12-fret, 14-fret 0, and 12- and 14-fret 00 versions.)

The top is made from reclaimed old-growth Sitka that spent much of the 20th century as part of a floating structure that served as a camp for loggers and fishers. During the decades the logs floated in the cold, nutrient-rich waters of southeast Alaska, the spruce took on a dark bluish-gray color that highlights its bearclaw figuring. When the camps were disassembled and sold off for homes and lumber, a supplier contacted Collings' master luthier, Bruce Van Wart, about these unique logs. Knowing a good story when he hears it, he wanted to check them out.

While the visual effect is powerful, Van Wart says the real benefit of this wood is that it has seasoned for a very long time. "Working with reclaimed wood can have the advantage of it being seasoned so much longer, which tends to make for ideal tonal characteristics for acoustic instruments," he says. "It's similar to other reclaimed spruce I've used in the past—they are lighter and a little stiffer than some Sitka, which means voicing them a little differently."

Clearly, plain wood wasn't going to cut it for the back and sides, so Van Wart chose elegant curly mahogany. While it provides a striking contrast to the top, it also has the physical and tonal characteristics Van Wart looks for when selecting tonewoods. This unique set needed something beyond the abalone rosette and full binding of the company's Style 3, so Collings commissioned a set of masterfully engraved fretboard inlays inspired by those on vintage banjos. The result is a guitar that has stories to tell before its first strum. **AG**



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