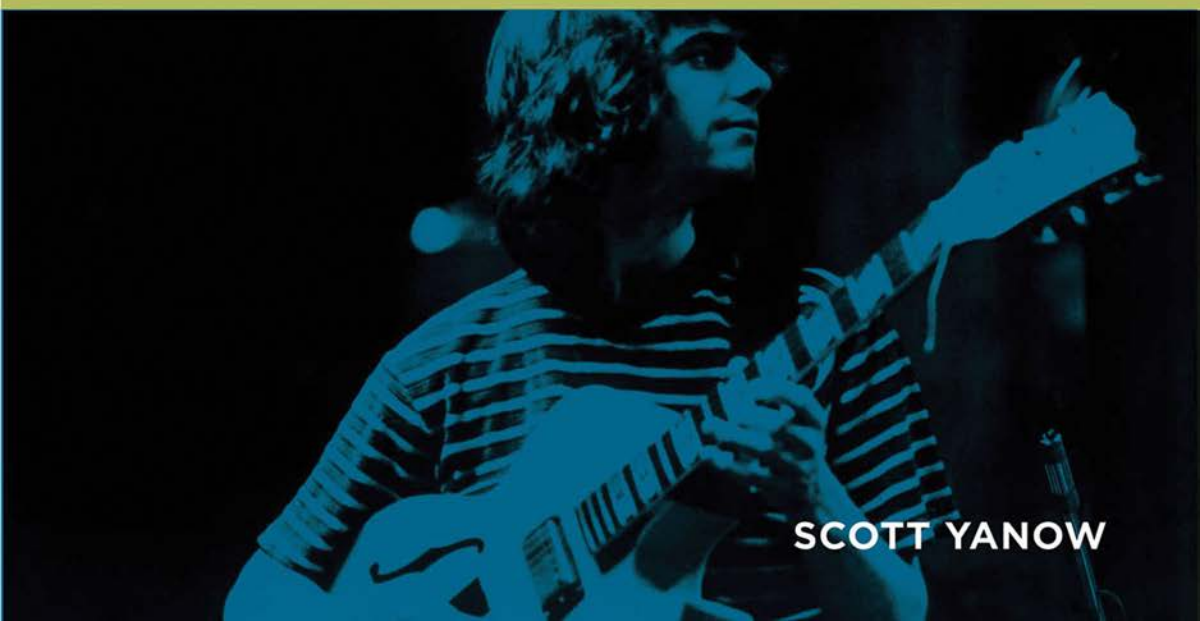




THE GREAT **Jazz**  
Guitarists

The Ultimate Guide



SCOTT YANOW

---

## **The Great Jazz Guitarists**

Also by Scott Yanow

*Swing*

*Bebop*

*Classic Jazz*

*Trumpet Kings*

*Afro-Cuban Jazz*

*Jazz On Film*

*Jazz On Record: The First Sixty Years*

*Duke Ellington*

*Jazz: A Regional Exploration*

*The Jazz Singers*

---

# **The Great Jazz Guitarists**

*The Ultimate Guide*

Scott Yanow



Copyright © 2013 by Scott Yanow

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, without written permission, except by a newspaper or magazine reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review.

Published in 2013 by Backbeat Books  
An Imprint of Globe Pequot  
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200  
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Distributed by NATIONAL BOOK NETWORK

Book design by Snow Creative Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Yanow, Scott.

The great jazz guitarists : the ultimate guide / by Scott Yanow.  
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references, discography, and  
filmography. ISBN 978-1-61713-023-6

1. Guitarists. 2. Jazz musicians. 3. Guitar music (Jazz)—History and criticism. I. Title.

ML399.Y358 2013

787.87'1650922—dc23

[B]

2012050685

---

## CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgments                              | vii |
| Introduction to the Jazz Guitarists          | ix  |
| The 342 Great Jazz Guitarists                | 1   |
| 44 Other Historic Guitarists                 | 211 |
| 175 Other Jazz Guitarists on the Scene Today | 215 |
| They Also Played Jazz Guitar                 | 231 |
| Jazz Guitarists on Film                      | 235 |
| Other Books on Jazz Guitarists               | 237 |



---

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In addition to the 154 guitarists who took the time and trouble to answer a detailed questionnaire that I sent, I was assisted in small and large ways by these 20 people, who often suggested or helped track down specific guitarists. I want to thank (in alphabetical order) Ron Anthony, Jeffrey Andrew Caddick, Anders Chan-Tidemann, Christophe Deghelt, Jim Eigo, Gary Fukushima, Joanie Henderson, Tamm E. Hunt, Jon-Erik Kellso, Judi K, Jack Leitenberg, Mundell Lowe, Jenny McVie, Robert Nolting, Red O'Sullivan, Ali Ryerson, Brooke Vigoda, Dory Yanow, Doug Yoel, and Barry Zweig.

I also want to express my appreciation to Steve Subrizi, the tireless copy editor of this book, and the staff at Backbeat Books, including Mike Edison and Jessica Burr, for their belief in the project.

A special thank you goes out to Brian Ashley who, as editor of *Record Review*, got me started writing about jazz 37 years ago. And most of all, a heartfelt thanks and love to Dory Yanow (to whom this book is dedicated), whose love, consistently great ideas, enthusiasm and desire to always cheer me on made the completion of this long project possible.



---

# INTRODUCTION TO THE JAZZ GUITARISTS

The guitar has always had an odd position in the jazz world. While it is difficult to imagine a rock group, a blues band with over three pieces, a folk singer, or a bluegrass ensemble not having at least one guitar, many of the most important jazz bands have gotten along fine without a guitarist. There were no guitars in the original Benny Goodman Quartet, the Charlie Parker Quintet, the Birth of the Cool Nonet, either of Miles Davis' classic quintets, or the famous John Coltrane Quartet. The role of the guitar (is it a member of the rhythm section or part of the frontline with the horns?) was ambiguous and uncertain for decades. It would not be too much of an oversimplification to say that if no guitarist had ever played jazz, the history of the music would not be drastically different. That certainly cannot be said about the trumpet, saxophone or piano.

So why write a book about jazz guitarists? Skipping over the fact that the guitar is the world's most popular instrument (having succeeded the piano), it has had an intriguing history in jazz and spawned an assortment of colorful personalities. Its battle with the banjo for supremacy, the development and grudging acceptance of the electric guitar, its use in fusion of the 1970s, and the countless number of approaches that have been created since that time make this a story worth telling. More than any other instrumentalists in jazz, guitarists have been influenced by other idioms, from blues and rock to world music. That can make it a little difficult to decide whom to include in a book of this type, certainly much more than deciding whom to feature in *Trumpet Kings*. I believe that the 342 on whom I settled represent the most significant jazz guitarists, past, present and future. Undoubtedly, a new earth-shattering guitarist will emerge on the scene a week after this book is published, but at least I was able to cover the jazz guitar world of 1920–2010, with updates made in 2012.

In addition to the 342 greats, there are short mentions of 218 other guitarists (44 deceased and 175 active) who came close. Some of the 175 could make it to the upper ranks in the future. There is also a section on 36 performers famous for other activities who have also played jazz guitar.

When I started listening to jazz at the beginning of the 1970s, among the first guitarists who I heard were George Benson, Wes Montgomery, Herb Ellis, Barney Kessel and Al Di Meola. A few years later, I acquired a double-LP of Charlie Christian performances with Benny Goodman. It caused a light to

go on in my head, and I remarked, "Ahh, now it makes sense. It all connects together." I hope that reading *The Great Jazz Guitarists* will give readers the motivation to connect all of the dots.

## A Brief History of the Banjo in Jazz

First there was the guitar, then the banjo, and then the guitar.

While guitarists were part of some of the very first New Orleans jazz bands, by the time jazz was recorded, the banjo was the dominant string instrument. The origin of the banjo is not positively known, but the chances are that it was originally derived from the African ngoni instrument, which slaves recreated in a slightly different form in the Southern United States.

One of the first to popularize the instrument was Joel Sweeney, a white man, who led the Virginia Minstrels in minstrel shows as early as the 1830s. The instrument was frequently used in minstrel shows of the next 80 years due to its volume and portability. It has a ringing metallic sound that makes it easy to hear and allows the performer to function as a one-man band when it fits the situation. Several different variations of the banjo were developed, with the number of strings usually being four or five.

By the time jazz was being recorded in the 1920s, three types of banjos were utilized. The plectrum banjo (essentially a five-string banjo with one string removed) and the tenor banjo (a bit higher pitched and tuned like a mandolin or violin) both use four strings. They differ in their tuning and the size of their necks, with the plectrum being much taller and having more frets. The six-string guitar-banjo allowed musicians to create denser chords, and it led the way to the guitar's future dominance.

During the ragtime era (1899–1915), one would have expected that many of the recordings of rags would have been made by pianists. But due to the primitive recording techniques of the period, the piano did not pick up particularly well on records, and in ensembles it tended to be inaudible. However, the banjo, which was much louder than the acoustic guitar, proved to be ideal, and Vess Ossman (1868–1923) was the perfect musician for the time. His solos on the five-string banjo were quite popular. He first recorded in 1893 and was featured on a variety of instrumentals in his career, including syncopated

rag and marches. He went on tours, recorded in England, and for a time had his own dance band. He was among the first to record "Maple Leaf Rag," and was also featured on "The Stars And Stripes Forever." Ossman made his last recordings in 1917 and was never heard in a jazz setting, but he remained active up until his death in 1923 from a bad heart.

Fred Van Eps (1878–1960) idolized Ossman and by the late 1890s had become his main competitor. He began recording in 1897 and had a similar repertoire as Ossman, mixing together rags with popular tunes of the time. During 1912–22 he led the Van Eps Trio, a ragtime-oriented group that at times included Nathan Glantz or Rudy Wiedoeft on saxophone and Felix Arndt or Frank Banta on piano. In 1921, his band made one of the very first sound films, a short called *The Famous Van Eps Trio Plays A Bit Of Jazz*. That short can be considered the first near-jazz sound film. Van Eps, like Ossman, made around 1,000 recordings; the exact number is not known. With the rise of jazz, his popularity started to drop and he stopped recording after 1937. Van Eps attempted a comeback in the 1950s, recording for his own 5 String Banjo label as late as 1956. His son, George Van Eps, played banjo at first before mastering the guitar. It is a great pity that father and son never recorded together. And it is also surprising that few recordings by Vess Ossman or Fred Van Eps are currently available, and just as part of sampler CDs. A complete issuance of their work is long overdue.

The first jazz recordings were by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1917, a group that did not include a banjo or a guitar. However, by the early 1920s, the banjo had found its place in most working jazz groups. Due to the still-primitive quality of recordings, the guitar and the string bass were not used because they were considered to be inaudible, while drummers were restricted to using a few percussion instruments (such as a cow bell and a cymbal) so as not to overwhelm the ensembles. The rhythm was largely kept by a pianist and a strumming banjoist, with the latter generally stating each beat. While a tuba was sometimes used so there would be some bass notes, since musicians needed to take breaths, tuba players were only able to play on every other beat (the first and third beat). A banjoist was almost as indispensable as the pianist.

Only one banjoist in the 1920s could approach and even top the virtuosity of Vess Ossman and Fred Van Eps. Ironically, the first instrument of Harry Reser (1896–1965) was the guitar. As a youth, he also played violin, cello, piano, marimba, trumpet and saxophone. At 16, he began to dedicate himself to the banjo, and was inspired by the recordings of Ossman and Van Eps. Reser, who was from Ohio, worked in local dance bands before moving to New York in 1921. He immediately became greatly in demand

for studio work, recording with virtually all of the most significant studio orchestras and with all types of groups. At the same time, starting in 1922 with his recording of "Kitten On The Keys," he waxed a series of incredible banjo features that found him playing with the virtuosity, complexity and speed of the top pianists. Reser recorded more than 20 novelty rags, which still sound wondrous today; 14 are on *Banjo Crackerjax 1922–1930* (Shanachie).

But most of Reser's work in the 1920s was with hot dance groups. He led the radio band the Cliquot Club Eskimos (they appeared onstage dressed in eskimo suits) during 1925–35 while recording with similar groups under a wide variety of pseudonyms. Among the names that his band used on records were the Blue Kittens, the Bostonians, the Campus Boys, the Four Minstrels, the High Hatters, the Jazz Pilots, Earl Oliver's Jazz Babies, the Parlophone Syncopators, the Plantation Players, the Rounders, the Seven Rag Pickers, the Seven Wild Men, the Six Hayseeds, the Six Jumping Jacks, the Victorian Syncopators, and the Seven Little Polar Bears.

After the 1920s faded into history and the Cliquot Club Eskimos ended their decade on the radio, Reser went back to being a freelance studio musician. He wrote ten instruction books for the banjo, ukulele and guitar, and was active until his death in 1965.

The other banjoists of the 1920s were generally sidemen who simply kept the rhythm steady behind other musicians, taking occasional brief solos. Mike Pingatore, a member of Paul Whiteman's orchestra for 25 years, had occasional feature numbers (such as "The World Is Waiting For The Sunrise") but was mostly in the supporting cast. Elmer Snowden (1900–73) was the original leader of the Washingtonians in 1923 but lost his leadership role and his band in a dispute over money; it became the Duke Ellington Orchestra. While Snowden led other bands later in the decade, they did not record. He spent many years as a music teacher before making a comeback as a player in the 1950s and '60s, when he was viewed as a link to the past.

Ikey Robinson (1904–90) should have been a big star, for he was not only a fluent banjo soloist but a versatile singer who could also play guitar, clarinet and piano. He sounded great on records with Jabbo Smith's Rhythm Aces in 1929 and made a few worthy sessions of his own, included on "*Banjo*" *Ikey Robinson* (RST 1508), but he spent decades in obscurity in Chicago, where he moved in 1934.

Johnny St. Cyr (1890–1966) is famous for playing his guitar-banjo on the recordings of Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and his Hot Seven during 1925–27. A decent soloist, St. Cyr was most significant as a rhythm player. He was part of the New Orleans jazz scene as early as 1905 and along the way worked with Kid Ory, Fate Marable, Freddie Keppard and,

in the 1920s, on records with King Oliver, Doc Cook, and Jelly Roll Morton.

Other fine banjoists of the classic jazz era include Charlie Dixon (with Fletcher Henderson's orchestra during 1921–28), Dave Wilborn (with McKinney's Cotton Pickers in 1928–31), Steve Washington (with the Washboard Rhythm Kings during 1931–32), Lee Blair, Buddy Christian, Bud Scott (with King Oliver in 1923 and particularly effective on trumpeter Willie Hightower's 1927 session), Fred Guy (Duke Ellington's banjoist starting in 1924), and Howdy Quicksell, who played with Bix Beiderbecke in Jean Goldkette's big band of 1927.

But two events resulted in the end of the banjo's prominence in jazz. In 1925, Eddie Lang emerged as jazz's first major guitarist. And with the development of electrical recording during 1925–27, suddenly the guitar could be heard in ensembles. It was no longer necessary to use the banjo, which was louder and, when played by most banjoists other than Reser, had a repetitive and clanging sound. Although the banjo was still a major instrument in 1927, by 1929 the guitar was taking over, by 1931 most banjoists were doubling on guitar, and by 1934 banjoists were largely extinct other than Mike Pingatore. The instrument might be trotted out for nostalgia purposes, but the banjo was no longer taken seriously in jazz. One would be hard-pressed to name a single rhythm banjoist in swing era big bands.

The banjo did find a place in other kinds of music. While it was never that major in the blues (Papa Charlie Jackson was the only significant blues banjoist in the 1920s), Eddie Peabody was a colorful and popular performer who for a time was the world's most famous banjoist, although his flashy performances were mostly outside of jazz. The banjo found a home in country music, bluegrass, folk, Irish music and New Orleans jazz. While the Dixieland-oriented groups of the 1930s usually used rhythm guitar, the banjo was thought of as more "authentic" by many of the revivalists of the 1940s, despite the fact that the acoustic guitar was there at the beginning of jazz. By the 1950s, the banjo was an expected part of most New Orleans jazz-style bands, and it has had a similar role up to the present day, with very little musical evolution having taken place.

Clancy Hayes (1908–72) was a fine banjoist who played with Lu Watters' Buena Vista Jazz Band in the 1940s and later Bob Scobey, but much of his fame was due to his singing. Such banjoists as George Guesnon, Lawrence Marrero, Emanuel Sayles and Narvin Kimball were featured with New Orleans bands ranging from George Lewis to the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. Their style was primarily rhythmic, and they were more significant for helping hold the ensembles together than for any solos that they took. Danny Barker returned to the banjo from rhythm

guitar when he returned to New Orleans in 1965, becoming a significant teacher and an inspiration in general to younger musicians. Banjoists active today include Eddy Davis (who often plays with Woody Allen's band), Jimmy Mazzy, Cynthia Sayer, and Eddie Erickson (who doubles on guitar). Also worth mentioning is Howard Alden, who, although he has spent most of his life playing guitar, recorded *Plays The Music Of Harry Reser* (Stomp Off 1200), a remarkable recreation of Reser's banjo solos.

But outside of New Orleans jazz, the banjo quickly disappeared from jazz after 1932. While most of the guitarists who rose to prominence in the 1930s had started on banjo (including Django Reinhardt) or at least doubled on it earlier in their careers, the ones in the 1940s rarely did unless they were also studio musicians. There were no significant banjo soloists in the bop movement, in cool jazz, hard bop, or even the avant-garde of the 1960s.

But surprisingly, there was one banjoist whose eclectic repertoire and combination of styles made him the world's only fusion banjoist. Bela Fleck (b. 1958) came to jazz through bluegrass. As a teenager attending the High School of Music and Art, he was one of the first to adapt bebop for the banjo. He picked up experience with several groups and during 1982–90 was part of the New Grass Revival, using bluegrass instruments to play a variety of different kinds of music, including some jazz. By 1990, he was leading the Flecktones, a unique band consisting of Howard Levy on harmonica, electric bassist Victor Wooten and Roy "Future Man" Wooten on the electronic drum called the drumitar. Although Levy eventually dropped out, the Flecktones have stayed together up until the present time, with Fleck's banjo being featured in fusion, modern jazz, blues, world music, and other idioms. He has even recorded a duet album with Chick Corea, and in 2012, he recorded and performed with the Marcus Roberts Trio.

But Bela Fleck stands alone and has yet to influence guitarists to switch to banjo. The guitar's future seems pretty secure.

## A Brief History of the Jazz Guitar

The history of the guitar in jazz can be divided into three separate struggles: the battle to become part of jazz, to be audible, and to find its own role in the music. It took some time, but the jazz guitar won all three battles and is now in its golden age.

While it is tempting to say that the jazz guitar began with Eddie Lang in 1925, the guitar was used in jazz groups from the very beginning. Most early New Orleans bands had a guitarist, and in fact, one of the first bands to be considered a bit jazz-oriented was

led by guitarist Charlie Galloway as early as 1889. Galloway led a string band that by the mid-1890s also had brass and woodwind players, including pioneer cornetist Buddy Bolden, shortly before Bolden put together his own group in 1895. Bolden's bands of 1895–1906 usually had a guitarist, including Galloway, Brock Mumford (who was with Bolden during 1897–1905 and is in the only photograph ever taken of the cornetist) and Lorenzo Staulz. Other early jazz guitarists (none of whom had the chance to record) include Dominick Barocco, Joe Guiffre, Coochie Martin and Rene Baptiste. Louis Keppard (1888–1986), cornetist Freddie Keppard's older brother, led the Magnolia Orchestra (his sideman included King Oliver, trombonist Honoré Dutrey and bassist Pops Foster) around 1910. While he worked with other New Orleans bands and visited Chicago as early as 1917, Keppard spent his life in New Orleans, and his only recordings were with Wooden Joe Nicholas in 1949.

A feature on the New Orleans music scene from around 1890–1920 was string bands that usually consisted of guitar, bass, and mandolin or violin. String bands played for dances and parties in which quieter and more polite music was desired rather than brass bands. While several string bands recorded, none of the ones that appeared on record before 1917 could be considered jazz groups. Eventually cornets, clarinets and other instruments were added, and by the mid-1920s, this type of string band had passed into history.

Although the guitar preceded the banjo into jazz groups, by the time jazz was starting to be recorded, the guitar (which was considered inaudible by recording engineers) was largely absent in favor of the louder banjo. Prior to 1925, not only was Nick Lucas the most significant jazz guitarist, but, at least on records, he was practically the only one. Lucas, who recorded test cylinders as early as 1912, began making records in 1921. His "Pickin' The Guitar" and "Teasing The Frets" from 1922 are the earliest examples of unaccompanied solo guitar. Lucas fought to record on guitar with studio orchestras at a time when banjos were becoming commonplace. But due to the popularity of his singing, by the mid-1920s his guitar playing had become secondary to his vocals.

Eddie Lang played both guitar and banjo with Red McKenzie's Mound City Blue Blowers during 1924–25 and then became a very significant New York studio musician. Due to the sophistication and versatility of his playing and the steady improvement in recording techniques, during 1925–29 the guitar won its battle over the banjo to be accepted in jazz. The guitar was found to be a much more flexible instrument, and while still felt more than heard in dense ensembles, it gradually became an

indispensable instrument in larger ensembles and big bands, keeping the rhythm steady and stating chords.

While guitar soloists were very common in blues recordings from the mid-1920s on, they were a rarity in jazz for quite some time. Although the acoustic guitar could now at least be heard, it rarely had the commanding presence needed to be a solo instrument. Even Lang was mostly featured as a supportive player who took very brief solo breaks on most recordings on which he appeared. There were some special occasions, including dates where he was accompanied by just a pianist, and brilliant duet guitar sessions with Lonnie Johnson and Carl Kress, but even sessions that he co-led with violinist Joe Venuti mostly had Lang supplying the accompaniment. The same was true of such superb late 1920s/early '30s studio guitarists as Carl Kress, Dick McDonough and George Van Eps.

The top guitar soloist of the 1930s (and possibly of all time) was Django Reinhardt. He overcame the difficulty in being heard by performing with the premiere swing string group, the Quintet of the Hot Club of France, which featured him joined by violinist Stéphane Grappelli, two rhythm guitars and string bass. A strong influence in Europe during the era, Reinhardt was overshadowed by the arrival in 1939 of Charlie Christian and the electric guitar, and few today realize that by the late 1940s he had developed into one of the top bop-oriented guitarists.

Django Reinhardt aside, few jazz guitarists of the 1930s had much solo space and, due to their instrument being so quiet, were restricted to keeping the rhythm behind other soloists. While the rhythm guitar is an art form in itself, and nearly every big band of the swing era included a rhythm guitarist in its lineup (Freddie Green with Count Basie and Allan Reuss with Benny Goodman were among the best), it was a frustrating role for those who wanted to solo and be on an equal footing with horn players. As early as the 1920s, there were experiments that sought to amplify the guitar, including those by Les Paul and George Barnes in the early-to-mid-1930s. An amplified guitar was patented by George Beauchamp as early as 1931, and some were built the following year, but they were not considered very efficient. An amplified Hawaiian guitar was used by musicians who played Hawaiian music, including Andy Iona as early as 1933. But it was not until March 1, 1938, when George Barnes recorded two songs on an electric Spanish guitar on a date with Big Bill Broonzy, that the electric guitar made its debut in jazz. Fifteen days later, Eddie Durham recorded on electric guitar with the Kansas City Five (a group of Count Basie-associated musicians). That year, several acoustic guitarists began to experiment with the electric guitar, including Charlie Christian.

When Christian was discovered by producer John Hammond and joined Benny Goodman in 1939, it changed the history of the guitar. For the first time, a guitarist could compete on the same level (both artistically and in volume) with a horn player. Christian was influenced not so much by Lang and Reinhardt as by Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins and Louis Armstrong. His phrases and catchy riffs became the main source of the vocabulary of guitar soloists for the next 25 years. His influence on guitarists was similar to that of Charlie Parker on horn players a few years later. In fact, the early history of the guitar can be divided into two periods: before Charlie Christian and after Charlie Christian.

Christian's early death in 1942 kept him from exploring bebop, but he set the stage for what was to come on his instrument. With only a few exceptions, the jazz guitarists who emerged during the 1940s, '50s and at least the first half of the '60s were following closely in Charlie Christian's footsteps. Even the ones who developed their own approach to bebop sounded like close relatives. Tiny Grimes, Al Casey, Oscar Moore and Slim Gaillard were among the first to be influenced by Christian. The bop era included some fine guitarists (including Barney Kessel, Remo Palmieri, Chuck Wayne, Billy Bauer and Bill DeArango) but none had the impact of a Dizzy Gillespie or Miles Davis. In the 1950s, Jimmy Raney was the best of the cool jazz guitarists, Johnny Smith was greatly admired, Tal Farlow could not be beat at fast tempos, Herb Ellis avoided being buried by Oscar Peterson (a difficult feat), and Kenny Burrell pioneered the guitar-bass-drums trio. The Chico Hamilton Quintet featured such guitarists as Jim Hall, John Pisano and Dennis Budimir. The guitar became an integral part of soul-jazz organ groups, interacting with organ, drums and sometimes a tenor-sax.

The 1960s brought to fame Wes Montgomery, Grant Green and George Benson. But still to a large extent, nearly all of the jazz guitarists of the time were strongly influenced by Charlie Christian. Even Montgomery, whose mastery of octaves and brilliance put him on the level of the very best ever, and Green, who stuck exclusively to single-note lines and considered his main influences to be horn players, were followers of Christian even as they developed their own individual voices within that style. Joe Pass brought the solo bop guitar to an unprecedented level in the 1970s. But few, other than the Brazilian guitarist Laurindo Almeida and Charlie Byrd (inspired by Django Reinhardt, classical music and Brazilian players), were able to forge new paths for the instrument. While the guitar had succeeded in being part of jazz, and it was very audible, there was no equivalent to John Coltrane or Miles Davis. No guitarist was blazing a new path in jazz, much less influencing players of other instruments, at least not yet.

That all changed by the end of the 1960s. First there were some new individualists who were much less influenced by Christian. Larry Coryell, who can be considered the first fusion guitarist, brought the influence of mid-1960s rock and electric blues into jazz. Gabor Szabo, playing with Chico Hamilton and his own groups, brought in his Eastern European heritage. Derek Bailey and Sonny Sharrock came up with two very different ways of playing avant-garde jazz.

But it was the arrival of John McLaughlin, who brought the sound, power and energy of rock along with a superb technique and a constantly fertile imagination, that opened up infinite possibilities for jazz guitarists. No longer did guitarists have to compete with or play a subservient role to horn players. They could be the leaders and the main stars, and they could play in any style that they desired, or have an approach beyond any style.

Since the early 1970s, the evolution of the jazz guitar has gone in many different directions. John McLaughlin went in several directions by himself, playing fusion, Indian music, straight-ahead jazz and unclassifiable post-bop. Al Di Meola went from fusion to other forms of creative jazz strongly influenced by world music. Larry Coryell has covered fusion and bop, and all three of these guitarists have spent a lot of time exploring the acoustic guitar. Other adventurous guitar greats of the past 40 years have included Pat Martino (who slightly preceded McLaughlin), John Abercrombie, Philip Catherine, Allan Holdsworth, Scott Henderson, Steve Khan, Terje Rypdal, Ralph Towner (mostly on acoustic guitar) and Mike Stern.

That only scratches the surface of the present state of the jazz guitar. The "big three" of modern jazz guitar—Pat Metheny, John Scofield and Bill Frisell—while all saying that they were inspired to a degree by the still very active Jim Hall, each have their own sounds and musical personalities, playing music beyond any simple classification. There are also many guitarists around who play mainstream jazz or creatively in historic styles, including Marty Grosz, Howard Alden, Peter Bernstein, Joe Cohn, Russell Malone and Duke Robillard. Pop/jazz is well represented by Larry Carlton and Lee Ritenour, both Stanley Jordan and Charlie Hunter have come up with new techniques to express themselves in straight-ahead and funky jazz, and Earl Klugh shows how pretty a guitar can sound. In addition, the rise of "gypsy jazz," first in Europe and more recently in the United States, has resulted in many guitarists exploring the musical legacy of Django Reinhardt, often on acoustic guitar. These include Biréli Lagrène, Stochelo Rosenberg, Jimmy Rosenberg, Dorado Schmitt, and Angelo Debarre among many others.

Whether played by Kurt Rosenwinkel or Julian

Lage, Anthony Wilson or Eugene Chadbourne, the potential of the jazz guitar is limitless and the current scene is full of giants.

## Other Significant Guitarists

Unlike the trumpet and the saxophone, the jazz guitar has consistently been strongly influenced by events on its instrument from other worlds of music, whether it is Segovia or Jimi Hendrix.

The guitar has had a long history. It had many ancestors among string instruments that were plucked, and could be said to have been invented over 3,000 years ago, but it all depends on how one defines a guitar. A stone carving from around 1300 B.C. depicts an instrument that looks like a guitar. Preceded by the *oud* and the six-string Scandinavian *lut* (or lute), the guitar began to really develop in Spain in the 1400s, when it had four pairs of strings. In 1546, the earliest known music for the guitar was published, *Tres Libros De Musica En Cifras Para Vihuela* by Alonso Mudarra. A century later, many guitars had five double strings, although by the mid-1700s the guitar dropped the double strings and became a six-string instrument. It was first taken seriously in classical music in the 1800s, and around 1850 the guitar (which was originally a very small instrument) was increased in size by Antonio de Torres Jurado, who developed the acoustic guitar that is around today. Many different variants have been used since that time, but the modern guitar can be said to have been around for over 150 years.

While the guitar was originally not considered suitable for classical music, in the early 1800s composer Fernando Sor (1778–1839) wrote many classical pieces for the guitar, promoting it as a legitimate instrument. Dionisio Aguado (1784–1849) was considered one of the first classical virtuosos on guitar, performing at pioneering concerts. Still, for many years the guitar was primarily associated with Spain, where it was played in taverns and bars, usually by gypsies. But decades after Sor, the Spanish composer Francisco Tarrega (1852–1909) did a great deal to get the guitar into classical music, writing quite a few guitar pieces, as did Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895–1968) and Heitor Villa-Lobos (1881–1959).

Andrés Segovia (1893–1987), who was only a teenager when Tarrega died, was the classical virtuoso whom Tarrega probably dreamt of. Segovia was at the top of his small field in the 1920s, and his 1928 American debut in New York was seen by Eddie Lang and other jazz musicians of the period. It was an important event that pronounced that the guitar was a “legit” instrument. Segovia transposed music from other instruments to the guitar, and there

were also many classical pieces written specifically for him. He did more than any other musician to get the guitar accepted in classical music and taught in schools. Even if the guitar is still not as associated with classical music as the violin or piano, Segovia stands as a major figure who inspired such current-day classical guitarists as Julian Bream (1933–), John Williams (1941–), Christopher Parkening (1947–) and Sharon Isbin (1956–), plus a few classical guitarists who have also played jazz, most notably Laurindo Almeida and Carlos Barbosa-Lima (1944–).

While it was a battle to get the guitar accepted in classical music, it never had any problem becoming part of the blues world, where it has reigned supreme from the beginning. Even the banjo was never a serious contender. Whether it was the street guitarist who inspired W.C. Handy to write “St. Louis Blues” (which he copyrighted in 1914) or other long-forgotten performers from the 1890s on, the history and development of the blues is inconceivable without the guitar. Lonnie Johnson was among the blues-oriented guitarists who were performing in New Orleans during the teens. The first significant blues guitarist to be recorded was Sylvester Weaver (1897–1960), who on November 7, 1923, recorded “Guitar Blues” and “Guitar Rag.” Although these were not the first unaccompanied guitar solos to be documented (Nick Lucas beat him to records by a year), they briefly made Weaver the first blues guitar hero. But while he lived until 1960, Weaver made no recordings after 1927 and was long forgotten.

Because the acoustic guitar is such an expressive instrument, very portable, and it can be used by those functioning as a one-man blues band or in a group, it flourished in the blues before it emerged as a major solo instrument in jazz. Among the major blues guitarists of the 1920s and ’30s were Blind Lemon Jefferson (1893–1929), Blind Blake (circa 1893–1933), Tampa Red (1904–81), Charlie Patton (circa 1887–1934), Robert Johnson (1911–38), Memphis Minnie (1897–1973), Blind Willie McTell (1898–1959) and Big Bill Broonzy (1898–1958). Most of these guitarists had careers that were independent from jazz, such as the country blues greats Blind Lemon Jefferson, Charlie Patton, Memphis Minnie and the short-lived Robert Johnson. Several of the others could have been successful jazz guitarists if that had been their goal. Blind Blake used clarinetist Johnny Dodds on one of his hotter sessions, Tampa Red’s goodtime hokum music (where practically every song seemed to be a variation of “It’s Tight Like That”) from the late 1920s/early ’30s was close to jazz, and Blind Willie McTell certainly had the technique to play jazz, although he never did. Big Bill Broonzy sometimes crossed over into jazz, particularly in his late 1930s Chicago recordings, although he stayed tied to blues and folk music. Leadbelly (1888–1949)

was the ultimate early folk singer, included blues in his repertoire, and in the 1940s sometimes appeared at jazz concerts (including with Bunk Johnson) as a symbol of the roots of jazz.

Jazz and country music overlapped most often during the 1930s and '40s when Western swing was at its height. Since Western swing is a form of jazz, some of its best guitarists are included in the main entries. One of the main instruments of many country groups has been the steel guitar. While a few of the pioneering steel guitarists (particularly the Hawaiian players of the 1920s) are in the main entries along with bandleader Alvino Rey and Roy Smeck, in general steel guitarists are outside the scope of this book since it is a different instrument. Andy Sanella (1900–62) appeared on a countless number of recordings in the 1920s, playing very effective jazz clarinet and alto. His steel guitar playing added an exotic sound to many of the records, and his fluidity and creativity on that instrument made him second to Roy Smeck among the part-time steel guitarists of the era. An early death kept Sam Ku West (1907–30) from being ranked among the best Hawaiian steel guitarists, but his recordings show that he was close. Among the steel guitarists who set the standard for Western swing and country music were Leon McAuliffe (1917–88), Noel Boggs (1917–74), Herb Remington (1926–), Joaquin Murphey (1923–99), Speedy West (1924–2003), and Doug Jerigan (1946–). Bob Dunn (1908–71) was particularly jazz-oriented, as can be heard on the superb two-CD set *Master Of The Electric Steel Guitar 1935–1950* (Origin Jazz Library 1004). Probably the most jazz-oriented of the Nashville steel guitarists of the past half century is Buddy Emmons (1927–), who recorded an album called *Steel Guitar Jazz* (Verve 542536) in 1963 and sometimes collaborated with Lenny Breau.

Sticking for a moment with instruments related to the guitar, the Spirits of Rhythm in the 1930s was a hot jive group that featured Douglas Daniels, Wilbur Daniels and drummer Leo Watson (best known as an innovative scat singer) on the *triple*, a small guitar similar in size to a mandolin although with a lower-pitched sound. All of the group's recordings are available as *The Spirits Of Rhythm* (Retrieval 79004).

While the mandolin has a colorful history of its own—as a descendant of the lute and an integral part of bluegrass (starting with Bill Monroe) and in the folk musics of many countries, including Italy, England, Scotland, Ireland, Portugal, Greece, Brazil and Japan—it has only been utilized in jazz on rare occasions. The Harlem Hamfats, a blues/jazz group from Chicago in the 1930s, had Charlie McCoy taking mandolin solos. Tiny Moore (1920–87) of Bob Wills' Texas Playboys played an electric five-string mandolin. Jethro Burns (1920–89) was a superior jazz mandolinist, although jazz was only part of

what he played. While there have been several mandolinists who have played jazz in more recent times, including Mike Marshall (1960–), Dave Grisman (1945–) is in his own category. His background was in bluegrass but he has always been interested in swinging jazz and crossing stylistic boundary lines. Part of the “new acoustic” movement, Grisman (who calls his open-ended style “dawg music”) has often recorded swing, including *Hot Dawg* (A&M 75021-3292), which teams him with guitarist Tony Rice and guest Stéphane Grappelli.

With the rise of the electric guitar, by the early 1940s the blues world had its Charlie Christian in T-Bone Walker, whose music sometimes crossed over into swinging jazz. Walker was an influence on the most famous guitarist in rock and roll of the 1950s, Chuck Berry (1926–), who took some of his licks directly from Walker. Berry's background was in the blues before he gained great commercial success. Walker was also an inspiration for the most popular of all blues performers, B.B. King (1925–), whose illustrious career often found him performing at both blues and jazz festivals. King resisted any temptation to play jazz (although he loves Charlie Christian and other key jazz guitarists) other than occasional salutes to Louis Jordan and jamming on uptempo instrumental blues.

Two of the major blues artists to have an impact in the 1950s were much further away from jazz than T-Bone Walker and the always-accessible B.B. King. John Lee Hooker (1912–2001) was both primitive in his playing (looking back to the earliest country blues) and futuristic. Hooker was playing one-chord jams a decade before Ornette Coleman, and his tonal distortions predated the more adventurous rock guitarists of the late 1960s. Muddy Waters (1913–83) defined Chicago blues of the 1950s, leading the way to rock and roll while remaining deep in the blues, both as a guitarist and as a highly influential singer.

Pee Wee Crayton (1914–85) and Mickey Baker (1925–) were both originally jazz guitarists who found it much easier to make a living playing in the studios and straddling the worlds of blues and R&B. In the late 1950s/early '60s, with the folk and blues revival, many of the surviving blues artists of the 1920s and '30s were rediscovered and recorded. One of the very best was Rev. Gary Davis (1896–1972), a brilliant guitarist whose repertoire included ragtime-style tunes along with blues and spirituals.

While jazz and rock mostly stayed very separate during 1955–65, and very few in the jazz world took Chuck Berry all that seriously as a guitarist, the quality of rock guitarists began to rise sharply after the mid-1960s, and the younger generation of jazz guitarists listened closely. Of all the rock guitarists, Jimi Hendrix (1942–70) was the most innovative, a musician who, like John Coltrane, broke the sound

barrier. After gaining experience playing with a wide variety of rock and R&B groups during 1962–66, Hendrix recorded *Are You Experienced* in 1967. He gained notoriety for his wild shows (which included playing a guitar with his teeth and setting his guitar on fire) but is today most significant for his virtuosity and ability to create a wide range of intense and dramatic sounds on the guitar. His *Live At Monterey* DVD of his historic performance at the 1967 Monterey International Pop Festival is still remarkable. Late in his short life, Hendrix was reportedly discussing with Gil Evans the possibility of a joint recording. Since Miles Davis was also a fan, it is possible that had he lived, Hendrix would have recorded with Davis sometime in the 1970s and possibly become involved in fusion. As it is, some of his recordings are of blues and he hints at jazz in his more abstract improvisations. *Are You Experienced* (MCA 9007), *Axis: Bold As Love* (Universal 5301383), *Electric Ladyland* (Universal 91387), and *Band Of Gypsies* (Capitol 96414) are his main musical legacy, although there have been a countless number of posthumous discoveries and collections.

Jimi Hendrix not only changed rock guitar and was an influence on fusion and avant-garde jazz but was also very important in the evolution of the blues. Buddy Guy (1936–), who was already a major blues player, has utilized some of Hendrix's sounds in his own vocabulary. Stevie Ray Vaughan (1954–90), who is arguably the most recent and possibly the last of the blues innovators, built up his style where Hendrix left off, showing just how intense and powerful the blues guitar can sound.

Among the other guitarists of the rock world who have been admired by jazz guitarists are Michael Bloomfield (1943–81), who was a master of blues rock in the 1960s and '70s; Eric Clapton (1945–), whose lengthy solos as part of Cream sometimes bordered on jazz (although at heart he is a bluesman); Carlos Santana (1947–), a master of Latin rock who has flirted with jazz without ever crossing over; and Jeff Beck. While an influence on both blues and heavy metal guitarists, during 1975–76 Beck recorded a pair of superior instrumental fusion albums, *Blow By Blow* (Sony 5021819) and *Wired* (Sony 33849), that show that he could have been a major jazz guitarist if he had stuck to that course. Instead, it was up to John McLaughlin, Al Di Meola and others in the 1970s to use what they learned from Jimi Hendrix and his contemporaries plus their own imaginations to move the jazz guitar to a different dimension.

Today's modern jazz guitarists draw inspiration not only from their predecessors in jazz and those listed in this article but also from other unclassifiable guitarists, some of whom have very fresh approaches

to playing the acoustic guitar. Leo Kottke (1945–) brought folk music to a new level, Michael Hedges (1953–97) and Will Ackerman (1949–) were two of the best New Age guitarists (although both stretched beyond that idiom), and Paco de Lucía (1947–) is a master of flamenco music who held his own during tours with John McLaughlin, Larry Coryell and Al Di Meola.

It is thanks to the inspiration of all of these guitarists and the jazz innovators that the jazz guitar now occupies its own special world of music.

## So Who Are the Jazz Guitar Giants?

In this book, I have full-length entries on 342 great jazz guitarists. But who were the most significant ones? The guitarists listed below, due to the combination of virtuosity, originality, influence on others, and body of work, are the ones that I would rank at the top. Of course, the list is open to debate, but these are my top 30, listed roughly in chronological order.

Eddie Lang  
Carl Kress  
Dick McDonough  
George Van Eps  
Django Reinhardt  
Les Paul  
Charlie Christian  
Barney Kessel  
Tal Farlow  
Jimmy Raney  
Jim Hall  
Charlie Byrd  
Wes Montgomery  
Grant Green  
Joe Pass  
George Benson  
Pat Martino  
Derek Bailey  
Sonny Sharrock  
John McLaughlin  
Al Di Meola  
Pat Metheny  
John Scofield  
Howard Alden  
Bill Frisell  
Mike Stern  
Russell Malone  
Stanley Jordan  
Biréli Lagrène  
Charlie Hunter

## Introduction to the Entries

Here are some quick statistics: Of the 342 jazz guitarists in the main entry to the book, 239 are alive at this point, while 103 are deceased. One hundred fifty-four of the living guitarists answered the questionnaires I sent them, while the others did not respond to requests or were untraceable. Three hundred thirty of the guitarists are males, while just twelve are females. Sorry, I wish there were more, but that is how it is. The guitarists represent virtually every jazz style, with some of the players stretching the definition of jazz a bit.

The length of each entry does not necessarily convey the importance of the guitarist, so do not measure their significance by counting the number of words. The length often has much more to do with how interesting their answers were in the questionnaire or how colorful a life they have led.

Their quotes are, unless stated otherwise, taken from the questionnaire and are often just excerpts of their full response. I put a guitarist's birth name in parentheses if it differs drastically from the name by which they are best known. The recommended lists of CDs are not meant to form complete discographies, although that is true in the cases of some guitarists. The albums are listed loosely in chronological order and usually do not include samplers, best-of collections, or limited-edition box sets from the Mosaic label. Due to the always-strange recording industry, not all of the CDs are in print at the moment, but nearly all can be acquired with a bit of luck.

All of the guitarists who have entries in the main portion of this book, plus most of the ones listed in other sections, deserve to be heard. The jazz guitar has had a very interesting history, and I truly hope that this book does justice to each guitarist's story.



# THE 342 GREAT JAZZ GUITARISTS

## Rez Abbasi

b. August 27, 1965, Karachi, Pakistan

A highly original guitarist who infuses post-bop jazz with his Pakistani heritage, Rez Abbasi would never be mistaken for anyone else. Born in Pakistan, Abbasi was four when he moved with his parents to Los Angeles. He began on the guitar when he was 11. Abbasi worked with rock bands for a few years as a teenager before discovering jazz and classical music when he was 16. “They both gave me a reason to use my mind and become a scientist of music, as opposed to moving from band to band looking for fame. A friend of mine took me to see a concert of Joe Pass and Ella Fitzgerald and showed me the Omni book that contains Charlie Parker solos.”



In the 1980s, he attended the USC guitar program and earned a degree in jazz from the Manhattan School of Music, graduating in 1989. “All of my teachers in college were very helpful in setting a path. When I graduated, one of them, Rodney Jones, had me sub for him at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival with Ruth Brown. After we played, Charles Lloyd’s Fish out of Water group was on. That kind of playing still resonates with me till this day.”

Two months spent in India, where he studied tabla with Ustad Alla Rakha, also had a strong effect on Abbasi, awakening his interest in music from India and Pakistan. He has since worked with Kenny Werner (studying with the pianist and using him on one of his record dates), Tim Hagans, Billy Hart, Marvin “Smitty” Smith, Gary Thomas, Rick Margitza, D.D. Jackson, Dave Liebman, Dave Pietro, Sunny Jain, Tony Malaby, Ron Horton and other creative musicians.

As a leader, Rez Abbasi’s adventurous guitar has been featured on six albums. *Freedance* is a quartet with altoist John O’Gallagher, bassist David Phillips and drummer Tony Moreno, and he also has a very unique organ quartet that features Gary Versace, Dan Weiss and Kiran Ahluwalia.

“Other than recording and performing with my groups, I’ve been an integral part of Rudresh Mahanthappa’s Indo-Pak Coalition as well as his group called Dakshani. Also, I play and arrange music

for singer Kiran Ahluwalia’s project. Her music, as well as Rudresh’s and my own, can be considered hybrid music. We are influenced by both Western and Indian musical ideas and concepts. And I also did a wonderful recording with saxophonist Dave Pietro called *The Chakra Suite*, which incorporates Brazilian and Indian music with jazz. My goal is to create a world-based music steeped in jazz.”

**Recommended CDs:** Each of Rez Abbasi’s nine recordings as a leader are of strong interest and display their own personalities. 1995’s *Third Ear* (Cathexis 4) can be considered lyrical fusion. *Modern Memory* (Cathexis 3) has Abbasi on both electric and acoustic guitar, introducing a variety of colorful originals. *Out Of Body* (Feroza 480) has Abbasi exploring post-bop jazz. *Snake Charmer* (Arabesque 0166) has Abbasi doubling on sitar-guitar and leading a trio with organist Gary Versace and drummer Danny Weiss (also heard on tabla) with guests soprano-saxophonist Dave Liebman and the haunting voice of Kiran Ahluwalia (the guitarist’s wife). *Bazaar* (Zoho 200613) builds on *Snake Charmer*’s success, utilizing Versace, Weiss, Ahluwalia, altoist Rudresh Mahanthappa, Marc Mommaas on tenor and soprano, and percussionist Gautuam Siram. *Things To Come* (Sunnyside 281236) is even stronger, featuring Mahanthappa, pianist Vijay Iyer, bassist Johannes Weidenmuller, Weiss and Ahluwalia. Is it Indian music, post-bop jazz, soul jazz or world fusion? It is all of them and none of them. *Natural Selection* (Sunnyside 1264) with his acoustic quartet features Abbasi’s mastery of acoustic guitar. *Suno Suno* (Enja 9575) was his follow-up to *Things To Come*, while *Continuous Beat* (Enja) is an intimate trio set with bassist John Hebert and drummer Satoshi Takeishi.

**Website:** [www.reztone.com](http://www.reztone.com)

## John Abercrombie

b. December 16, 1944, Port Chester, NY

Although he has been a significant guitarist since the 1970s, John Abercrombie is a perfect symbol for modern jazz guitarists of the 21st century. While he has recorded some standards albums and



**Morris Acevedo**

occasional projects that could be considered soul jazz, hard bop or fusion, his playing and music are usually beyond any accurate categorization. He sounds like himself in every situation, is very versatile, and performs music that tends to be a bit unpredictable while always being creative jazz no matter what the setting. His playing may be difficult to write about, but it is always stimulating to hear.

Abercrombie, who grew up in Greenwich, Connecticut, began playing guitar when he was 14. "My first influence was the rock music of the '50s, including Chuck Berry, Mickey Baker (of Mickey and Sylvia), Fats Domino, Elvis Presley and others. My earliest gigs were with little rock bands, playing the music of the day at school dances, record hops and country clubs." He was introduced to jazz by friends and through records by Dave Brubeck, Barney Kessel and Miles Davis.

The young guitarist attended the Berklee School of Music during 1962–65. By then, Jim Hall, Wes Montgomery and Bill Evans were influences, but Abercrombie already had a sound of his own. He played locally while in school and, during 1967–69, picked up important experience working with organist Johnny "Hammond" Smith. "We played standard tunes and blues, usually in a trio setting. I really had to play on a professional level and be consistent night after night." Abercrombie next worked with the Brecker Brothers as part of their group Dreams and he was with Chico Hamilton's band during 1970–72. As a busy session player, he also recorded with Gil Evans, Gato Barbieri and Barry Miles. As a member of Billy Cobham's group, Abercrombie began to gain a lot of attention in the fusion world.

But that was not the direction that he really wanted to go. "The turning point for me was getting to meet Manfred Eicher and record for ECM." His *Timeless* album (a trio date with Jan Hammer and Jack DeJohnette) and *Gateway* (with DeJohnette and Dave Holland) set the stage for his career as early as 1975. Abercrombie recorded three albums as the leader of a quartet also featuring Richie Beirach, George Mraz and Peter Donald. He played guitar synthesizer for the first time while leading a trio with Marc Johnson and Peter Erskine, had reunions with the Gateway Trio in 1995, and teamed up with organist Dan Wall for a few projects. Other associations include Michael Brecker, Charles Lloyd (in the late 1990s), Jan Garbarek, Andy Laverne (with whom he has recorded on a few occasions for the Steeplechase label), a quintet with violinist Mark Feldman and Joe Lovano, and duet projects with Joe Beck, John Scofield and Ralph Towner.

In recent times, John Abercrombie has led an organ trio with Gary Versace and Adam Nussbaum,

and a quintet with Mark Feldman, Joey Baron, Marc Johnson or Thomas Morgan, and Marc Copland or Andy Laverne. He continues recording for ECM (and occasionally elsewhere) nearly four decades after *Timeless* and is an influential force on the modern jazz scene.

**Recommended CDs:** *Timeless* (ECM 1047), *Gateway* (ECM 1061), *Sargasso Sea* (ECM 1080) with Ralph Towner, *Gateway 2* (ECM 1105), *Characters* (ECM 1117), *Arcade* (ECM 1133), *Abercrombie Quartet* (ECM 1164), *M* (ECM 1191), *Night* (ECM 1272), *Current Events* (ECM 1311), *Getting There* (ECM 1321), *Abercrombie/Johnson/Erskine* (ECM 1390), *Animato* (ECM 1411), *Witchcraft* (Justin Time 16) with Don Thompson, *While We're Young* (ECM 1489), *November* (ECM 1502), *Speak Of The Devil* (ECM 1511), *Gateway: Homecoming* (ECM 1562), *In The Moment* (ECM 1574), *Now It Can Be Played* (Steeplechase 31314), *Tactics* (ECM 1623), *Open Land* (ECM 1683), *Cat 'N' Mouse* (ECM 1770), *Timelines* (Steeplechase 31538), *Three Guitars* (Chesky 248) with Larry Coryell and Badi Assad, *Class Trip* (ECM 1846), *A Nice Idea* (Steeplechase 31571), *Structures* (Chesky 317), *Third Quartet* (ECM 1993), *Topics* (Challenge 70137), *Wait Till You See Her* (ECM 2102), *Within A Song* (ECM 2254).

**Website:** [www.johnabercrombie.com](http://www.johnabercrombie.com)

**Morris Acevedo**

b. April 8, 1966, El Paso, TX

A versatile guitarist whose main influence is Jim Hall, Morris Acevedo has long been interested in all eras of jazz guitar, from Eddie Lang to Al Di Meola. "I started on rock guitar when I was 12 years old in the late 1970s. I enjoyed heavy rock like Led Zeppelin, but I also had a big interest in progressive rock like Yes and Genesis. The guitarists in those bands had jazz, classical and country influences, so that pointed me to a way of being a guitarist that was not just blues/rock based." He heard early Pat Metheny and that led him into jazz and exploring other guitarists, including Wes Montgomery and Charlie Christian.

Acevedo's first professional performance was after high school when he played with Arnett Cobb. He attended the University of North Texas and earned a degree in Jazz Composition and Arranging at Berklee. While based in the Boston area for over a decade, he had opportunities to play with Joshua Redman, Jim Black, Ken Vandermark, the Either Orchestra, the Charlie Kollhase Quintet, the organ trio Be-3, and Matt Wilson, plus some R&B and rock bands. "I was quite proud of a group I had in New York from 2004–07 called Quartet Doloroso with altoist Dave

Pietro. We performed the music of the Paul Desmond Quartet, the one with Jim Hall on guitar. We took their concept of playing melodically rather than bebop lines. It's been an approach that I've continued to use in many different styles of music as well."

After moving to the San Francisco Bay area, Acevedo played with Richie Cole's Alto Madness Orchestra, drummer Scott Amendola's group and Ann Dyer, and led his trio Dam East (with bassist Jon Christensen and drummer Kevin Stevens). He is currently the head of the music department at Cardinal Newman High School in Santa Rosa, California, conducting a 50-person guitar orchestra, teaching improvisation, and leading a jazz big band. "As far as my own music goes, I've been composing some instrumental music for guitar trio that uses all the jazz improvisation tools that I use in modern jazz, but the music has more of an almost rock groove. Also, I formed a group called the Plectrum Duo with another guitarist, Cody Anderson. We play acoustically and concentrate on the duet music that was played in the 1930s by guys like Carl Kress, Eddie Lang and Dick McDonough."

**Recommended CDs:** Quartet Delarosso recorded *Any Other Time* (Evander 042) in 2007. Acevedo's Electric Trio and Plectrum Duo have yet to record, although CDs are planned. Obscure recordings made with Dam East in the late 1990s will be reissued in the near future.

## Bernard Addison

*b. April 15, 1905, Annapolis, MD; d. December 18, 1990, Rockville Centre, NY*

Bernard Addison's chordal solo and accompaniment on "Toledo Shuffle" in 1935 (from a session co-led with trumpeter Freddie Jenkins) is so explosive and inventive that it is surprising that he never became famous or grew more in demand as a soloist. Addison started off playing violin and mandolin in his native Annapolis before becoming a banjoist. He moved to Washington, DC, in 1920, co-leading a group with pianist Claude Hopkins and working with Oliver Blackwell's Clowns. A few years later, he relocated to New York, picking up experience with Sonny Thompson, the Seminole Syncopators (with whom he made his recording debut in 1924), Harry's Happy Four and Ed Small's band (1925–28).

Switching to guitar in 1928, he began a decade of notable associations. Addison worked with Louis Armstrong, Bubber Miley's Mileage Makers, Milton Senior, Art Tatum (in Toledo during 1931–32 before Tatum made his move to New York), Russell Wooding, Fats Waller, the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra (1933–34) and Adelaide Hall. In addition to

Armstrong, Miley and Henderson, Addison recorded with Mamie Smith (1924), Sara Martin, Jelly Roll Morton (including "Fussy Mabel"), Henry "Red" Allen, Coleman Hawkins, the Wabash Trio, Bennett's Swamplanders, and Horace Henderson. His six titles with Freddie Jenkins, particularly "Toledo Shuffle," show how powerful an acoustic guitarist he could be.

When John Mills, Jr., who was not only one of the singing Mills Brothers but also their guitarist, passed away suddenly in 1936, Addison became the vocal quartet's guitarist for two years. He toured with the group around the US and Europe, recording frequently with the Mills Brothers and on a London date with Benny Carter, also taking a day off to record with Mezz Mezzrow. When Addison left the Mills Brothers in 1938, he was greatly in demand, working with Stuff Smith (1939) and Sidney Bechet; recording with Billie Holiday (including "Them There Eyes"), Zutty Singleton, Willie "The Lion" Smith, Red Allen; working on the famous session in 1940 that teamed together Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet; and playing an all-star date with Hawkins, Carter and Roy Eldridge.

Addison briefly led his own group before being drafted during World War II. After his discharge, the guitarist continued working, although he had a much lower profile. He gigged with Snub Mosley, freelanced in Canada for a few years, was part of the Fletcher Henderson Reunion Band of 1957, and was the guitarist with the Ink Spots in the late 1950s. After appearing with Eubie Blake at the 1960 Newport Jazz Festival and leading his only album, Addison was primarily a guitar teacher in his last decades. It seems odd that he did not perform with the many all-star trad and swing groups of the 1950s and '60s, but perhaps by then he preferred a quieter and more stable lifestyle.

**Recommended CDs:** The complete Freddy Jenkins session with "Toledo Shuffle" has not been available coherently since a Barney Bigard/Albert Nicholas RCA Vintage LP from the 1960s, but "Toledo Shuffle" pops up on a few CDs, including the grab-bag set *1927–1941: Legendary Jazz Guitarists* (Allegro/Jazz Legends 4003). *Louis Armstrong 1940–1942* (Classics 685), while mostly featuring Satch's big band recordings of the period, also has the four titles from the Armstrong-Bechet session, which includes some spots for Addison's guitar.

**LPs to Search For:** *Pete's Last Date* (77 SEU 12/52) reissues Bernard Addison's one album as a leader although under altoist Pete Brown's name. It was one of Addison's few opportunities to stretch out during the later part of his career, and he sounds fine on standards and basic originals in a quintet.

## Steve Adelson

## Steve Adelson

b. March 3, 1952, Brooklyn, NY

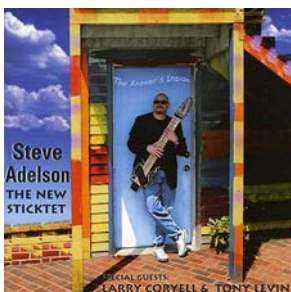
A master of the Chapman Stick in addition to being a fine post-bop guitarist, Steve Adelson leads a group that he calls the Sticktet. Adelson did not begin playing guitar until he was 17, when he was a chemical engineering major at City College. “All of my friends played folk and rock tunes of the time. Someone showed me a G Major chord, and I was hooked. I would practice constantly and probably had the guitar in my hands 8–12 hours a day.” He soon discovered jazz through his teacher Charlie Didier, studied music at Brooklyn College, and worked at local clubs and restaurants, including with pianist Kenny Barron, baritonist Cecil Payne and guitar duos at Peppers that teamed him with Jimmy Ponder, Attila Zoller, Jack Wilkins and Mark Elf. In 1977, he founded a music school, the Guitar Workshop.

In 1983, Adelson saw Emmett Chapman playing the Stick at a guitar expo, and it changed his musical life. Within a year, he had purchased a Stick, and that has been his main focus ever since. “The Stick is a twelve-string fingerboard, covering the guitar and bass range and played with the tapping (hammering) technique. I do clinics worldwide and have written an instruction book and a tutorial DVD package about the Stick. It has been very rewarding being involved in the growth process of the Stick and its music.”

Adelson has worked regularly at a restaurant in duos with vibraphonists, most notably Bryan Carrott. “I’m playing a unique and revolutionary instrument, one that needs exploration and documentation. It has been remarkable to produce music on Emmett’s invention and be part of a new instrument’s history.”

**Recommended CDs:** *Adventures In Stickology* (available from his website) is the best all-round showcase for Steve Adelson’s Stick playing. Originally, it was to be a duet recording with guitarist Steve Howe of Yes. But when Howe went on the road, Adelson put together duets/trios with nine different guitarists, including Ben Lacy, Chieli Minucci, Dean Brown, Phil deGruy, and Tony Levin, plus occasional drums or percussion. *The Answer’s Inside* (Jazzheads 1143) features Adelson’s Stick with a quintet (piano, guitar, Stick, drums and percussion) and guest Larry Coryell on some funky and easy-listening selections.

**Website:** [www.stevedelson.com](http://www.stevedelson.com)



## Dan Adler

b. July 8, 1959, Tel Aviv, Israel

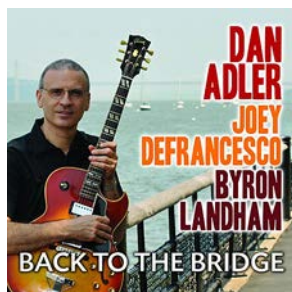
Although he has only led one CD so far, Dan Adler has shown himself to be a superior bop-based guitarist with a potentially significant musical future. Born and raised in Israel, he started having classical guitar lessons when he was ten. After a period of playing rock guitar, he got a jazz teacher, Avry Sharon, who had studied with Jim Hall and Chuck Wayne. “In high school, I started going to hang out at the only jazz club that existed back then in Israel. Soon, I became good enough to sit in and get my own gigs. It was hard to find jazz records in Israel back then, so I would subscribe to *Downbeat*, read the reviews, and based on that I had to special-order the records I wanted. When I first discovered jazz guitar, I listened to all of the great players. But it was Joe Pass who spoke to me on a different emotional and intellectual level. Everything he played made perfect sense to me.”

Adler worked a regular weekly gig in Israel in a quartet with Ilan Mochiach (an arranger who played vibes and tenor) and also had a chance to play with tenor-saxophonist Steve Grossman. He moved to New York City in 1986 but has never been a full-time musician, earning graduate degrees in computer science and electrical engineering. “I have always worked outside of music, first as a microchip designer and then as a software designer and architect. I consider myself very lucky not to have to teach music or play non-jazz gigs for a living as many professional musicians are forced to do given the state of the jazz industry. I consider playing music as my reward for doing everything else.”

Adler worked a regular weekly gig in Israel in a quartet with Ilan Mochiach (an arranger who played vibes and tenor) and also had a chance to play with tenor-saxophonist Steve Grossman. He moved to New York City in 1986 but has never been a full-time musician, earning graduate degrees in computer science and electrical engineering. “I have always worked outside of music, first as a microchip designer and then as a software designer and architect. I consider myself very lucky not to have to teach music or play non-jazz gigs for a living as many professional musicians are forced to do given the state of the jazz industry. I consider playing music as my reward for doing everything else.”

Dan Adler studied privately with a variety of guitarists in New York (most significantly Jack Wilkins), played guitar duets with Joe Giglio, and has worked with small groups in the years since, including duetting with pianist Richard Samuels, leading an organ trio, and playing with tenor-saxophonist Grant Stewart. Throughout his gigs, he has helped to keep the legacy of bebop jazz guitar alive.

**Recommended CDs:** Dan Adler’s debut recording, *All Things Familiar* (Emdam 820 360 13602), teams him with Grant Stewart and Richard Samuels. The quintet performs swinging versions of four standards and six of Adler’s originals, including “If I



Were A Jazz Man.” *Back To The Bridge* (Emdam 820 360 244325) features him in top form in a trio with organist Joey DeFrancesco and drummer Byron Landham.

**Website:** www.danadler.com

## Ron Affif

b. December 30, 1964, Pittsburgh, PA

A powerful and passionate bop-oriented guitarist, Ron Affif never seems to take an uninspired chorus. When he was 12, Affif received a record player, discovered the guitar, and received his first guitar lessons from his uncle, Ron Anthony. “My world was completely overwhelmed. That feeling is still the same, 34 years later.” Affif started his career playing in small bars in the Pittsburgh area. Encouraged by his parents, both of whom loved music, and older brother Mark, he developed quickly. Although he had private lessons, Affif never went to music school and learned his most important lessons onstage.

When he was 18, Affif moved to Los Angeles, making his first record, taking lessons from Joe Pass and working with Dick Berk, Dave Pike, Pete Christlieb and Jack Sheldon. Five years later in 1988, he relocated to New York. “Playing with Essiet Essiet and Jeff Watts really helped me find my voice. There are so many great musicians in New York, you can’t help but grow.”

Ron Affif, who recorded some notable albums for Pablo during 1993–99, played regularly at the Zinc Bar (which he founded) on Monday nights starting in 1996 and throughout New York in addition to touring Europe and Asia. He has generally been featured with his trio, although he toured with Claudia Acuña during 2006–07 and has worked at the Carlyle Hotel for three years with the Loston Harris Trio. An enthusiastic soloist who also enjoys playing in ensembles, Affif says, “I love to play somewhere every night.”

**Recommended CDs:** Ron Affif led five albums for Pablo: *Ron Affif* (Pablo 2310949), *Vierd Blues* (Pablo 10954), *52nd Street* (Pablo 10958), *Ringside* (Pablo 10962), and *Solitude* (Pablo 10965); the latter features a full set of Affif creating beautiful unaccompanied solos. Surprisingly, he has only led one CD since that time, the lesser-known *Affif, Valibora, Grigliak* (Hevetia 6165).

## Noël Akchoté

b. December 7, 1968, Paris, France

An avant-garde guitarist who is nevertheless familiar with all jazz styles, Noël Akchoté has been creating

important music in his native France. He started on guitar when he was eight, taking lessons from a friend’s grandfather who ran a local music store. Akchoté also took basic classical guitar lessons in school. “Guitar became an obsession for me. I played all the time at home, carrying my nylon string guitar everywhere from my room to the living room, to dinner and in front of TV in the evening. By the time I was ten, I played all the time in any sort of styles with records, from jazz to rock, classical to chansons. Jazz was always around in France. The first time I was really totally blown away by jazz guitar was at age 10 when I was taken to a Baden Powell solo concert in Paris and some months later to a club where Jimmy Gourley was featured.”

Akchoté played in bars, hotels and restaurants (often in guitar duos) five nights a week, four to five hours a night, from the time he was 14 until he was 18. He was so busy that it is not surprising that he dropped out of school when he was 16. In addition to standards, he occasionally slipped in some Ornette Coleman and Albert Ayler tunes, playing them quietly and disguising them as Dixieland. He also doubled on bass and learned drums.

Akchoté—who played with Chet Baker, Barney Wilen and René Urtreger in his early days and took guitar lessons at workshops from Tal Farlow, Mickey Baker and Philip Catherine—eventually became a teacher himself. By the 1990s, he got even busier, working with Henri Texier, Daniel Humair, Aldo Romano, Louis Sclavis, Michel Portal, Glenn Ferris, Lol Coxhill, Sam Rivers and Joey Baron. Akchoté, who started the Rectangle Ltd. label in France in 1993, was in the free-funk group Trash Corporation and the acoustic trio the Recyclers. He played post-bop and free improvised music with Derek Bailey, Eugene Chadbourne, Fred Frith, Evan Parker, Lol Coxhill, Tim Berne, George Lewis, Herb Robertson, Phil Minton, Marc Ducret, Christian Escoudé, Marc Ribot and Ingrid Jensen. In addition, he wrote for a variety of magazines about different topics and has been an actor in films.

Akchoté became a founding member of the group Big Four in 2001, a band that also includes saxophonist Max Nagl, trumpeter Steven Bernstein and bassist Bradley Jones. In addition to touring with Big Four, in recent times he has played a lot of solo concerts, various shows with Han Bennink and top European musicians, and duets with guitarists Tetuzi Akiyama and Adam Levy.

“My practice has always been to cross many styles and approaches without any judgments as to what is ‘better’ or more ‘advanced.’ To me, there is a huge and obvious common root that guitar music has

## Howard Alden

embraced and that unifies blues, swing, jazz, gospel, early rock and most of what came out of it.”

**Recommended CDs:** *Lust Corner* (Winter & Winter 19) has intriguing and eccentric duets with either Marc Ribot or Eugene Chadbourne. *Noël Akchoté & Bruno Meillier* (SMI 209) teams Akchoté in duets with the reeds of Meillier. *Rien* (Winter & Winter 57) features Akchoté interacting with a turntablist and a manipulator of computers to achieve otherworldly sounds. *Alike Joseph, Simple Joseph and Perpetual Joseph* (all put out by Rectangle Ltd.) are unusual sets of accompanied guitar solos. *Adult Guitar* (Blue Chopsticks 13) has Akchoté playing 20 short pieces, including a few standards. *Sonny Vol. 2* (Winter & Winter 108) is a tribute to Sonny Sharrock. *Toi-Même* (Winter & Winter 910146) is with a larger group, and *Big Four Live* (Hatology 637) is an exciting set full of fire.

## Howard Alden

b. October 17, 1958, Newport Beach, CA

When he first rose to prominence in the 1980s, Howard Alden was part of a new generation of players who revived and revitalized small-group swing, along with tenor-saxophonist Scott Hamilton, cornetist Warren Vaché and trombonist Dan Barrett. Since then, he has stretched himself into bop, Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans, Herbie Nichols, and more modern tunes, but Alden is still a master of pre-bop styles.

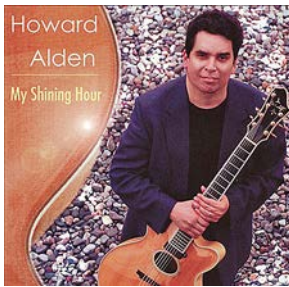
“I was ten years old when I started playing a tenor (four-string) guitar that was in our closet and had belonged to my uncle. Shortly after that, I started taking lessons in a local Huntington Beach music store from Charles Shortino. He was an old tenor banjo player from St. Louis who taught me right away to read music, play tunes, and play melodies with chords. After a few weeks, when I mentioned there was also a tenor banjo at home, he had me playing that, learning a lot of the old tunes from the '20s. On my own, I started improvising and playing a little jazz on the banjo. A couple of years later at a banjo club meeting, I met a part-time guitarist named Jim Elsaas, who introduced me to recordings of many of the classic jazz guitarists, including Barney Kessel, Charlie Christian, Django Reinhardt, Tal Farlow, George Van Eps, Jim Hall, Kenny Burrell, as well as

Joe Pass/Herb Ellis (the first Concord LP), Charlie Byrd and Chuck Wayne/Joe Puma. I made tapes of as many of these as I could; I was particularly smitten by Barney Kessel, who was a major influence on my guitar style. I got a six-string guitar and started learning to play it, adapting my knowledge from the tenor banjo tuning.”

Alden played banjo in a Long Beach pizza parlor, the Village Inn, as a teenager. He also worked at a different pizza parlor, Blinky's, when he was 16, learning from the pianists whom he played with. During the summers of 1976 and '77 (and part of '78), he played banjo at Disneyland, enjoying hearing the many jazz bands that were employed at Disney during the era. Alden attended Cal State Fullerton for two semesters, where he studied classical guitar. He also studied during 1977–78 at the Guitar Institute of Technology. He played Dixieland gigs with Dan Barrett, worked with Jake Hanna, and, in 1979, played guitar with Page Cavanaugh at a club in Encino. Singer Mavis Rivers heard him playing with Cavanaugh and recommended him to Red Norvo. In 1979, Alden worked with Norvo's vibes-guitar-bass trio for three and a half months during the summer in Atlantic City. He spent a few more years in Southern California, joined Joe Bushkin at the Cafe Carlyle in 1982, recorded with Bud Freeman, and moved to New York in 1983.

Since then, Howard Alden has performed with both swing veterans and the great players of his generation. His associations include Dan Barrett (with whom he co-led a notable quintet during 1985–95), Milt Hinton, Joe Williams, Woody Herman's small group (1984), Ruby Braff, Flip Phillips, Dick Hyman, Kenny Davern, Benny Carter, Dizzy Gillespie, George Van Eps (recording four CDs in the 1990s), Ken Peplowski, Ray Brown, Charlie Byrd, Carol Sloane, Mel Powell, Maxine Sullivan, Rosemary Clooney, Jack Wilkins, Bucky Pizzarelli, Warren Vaché, and George Wein's Newport All-Stars, plus a countless number of all-star groups. For the Woody Allen film *Sweet And Lowdown*, he played most of the guitar solos and taught actor Sean Penn (who played a guitarist inspired by Django Reinhardt) how to play guitar. Alden has led his own record dates since 1986 (starting with an impressive string for Concord), has appeared at many jazz festivals, parties and cruises, and has symbolized swing guitar for the past 25 years while keeping an open mind toward other jazz styles.

In recent times, in addition to touring with the Newport All-Stars (including an appearance at the 2010 Monterey Jazz Festival), Howard Alden has worked in New York City on weekly gigs with singer Jeanne Gies and on duo collaborations with Jack



Wilkins, Bucky Pizzarelli, Anat Cohen, Warren Vaché and Ken Peplowski. He has also appeared with many acoustic ensembles at Djangofest concerts and spends six months of the year performing in Europe. "I enjoy the adventure of playing with musicians all over the world. I also continually work to develop my potential on the seven-string guitar (acoustic and electric). A new goal of mine is to lead and travel with my own group and explore a wider range of musical ideas."

**Recommended CDs:** *Plays The Music Of Harry Reser* (Stomp Off 1200) is a stunning series of banjo solos originally recorded by Reser in the 1920s. *My Shining Hour*, *Take Your Pick* and *Your Story* have been cited by the guitarist as personal favorites, but all of Howard Alden's recordings are quite worthy, certainly including *Swing Street* (Concord 4349) with Dan Barrett, *The ABQ Salutes Buck Clayton* (Concord 4395), *Snowy Morning Blues* (Concord 4424), *No Amps Allowed* (Chiaroscuro 303), *Misterioso* (Concord 4487), *A Good Likeness* (Concord 4544), *Your Story: The Music Of Bill Evans* (Concord 4621), *Encore* (Concord 4654), *Concord Jazz Guitar Collective* (Concord 4672) with Jimmy Bruno and Frank Vignola, *Full Circle* (Concord 4788), *Hot Club Of 52nd Street* (Chesky 271), *Take Your Pick* (Concord 4743), *My Shining Hour* (Concord 4841) and *In A Mellow Tone* (Concord 2207) with Bucky Pizzarelli. Alden has also recorded extensively with a sideman, including with Ruby Braff (for Concord and Arbors); as co-leader with George Van Eps: *Thirteen Strings* (Concord 4464), *Hand Crafted Swing* (Concord 4513), *Seven & Seven* (Concord 4584), *Keepin' Time* (Concord 4713); with Scott Hamilton: *Race Point* (Concord 4492), *Groovin' High* (Concord 4509); with Ken Peplowski: *Live At Maybeck Recital Hall* (Concord 4556); and with Dick Hyman: *Cheek To Cheek* (Arbors 19155).

**Website:** www.howardalden.com

## Johnny Alegre

(Juan Bautista H. Alegre III)

b. June 4, 1955, Pasay City, Greater Manila, Philippines

Johnny Alegre has become increasingly significant during the past decade as a jazz guitarist from the Philippines. He grew up listening to American pop music, rock, Motown and British blues. "I taught myself to play an acoustic guitar when I was 15, and after, with money saved up, I bought a secondhand semi-hollow electric guitar and an amplifier, joining my first rock 'n' roll garage band." Alegre started his career as a folk singer-songwriter, meeting a lot of musicians and making important contacts.

He frequented the Thomas Jefferson Cultural Center and Library, which was run by the US Information Services in Manila. Alegre discovered jazz through the library's huge record collection and became a record collector. Alegre attended the University of the Philippines' College of Music, studying composition and enrolling in the jazz program, playing in the university's jazz ensemble. "My first concerts as a teenage musician are the obvious choices for turning points in my career, particularly the one when I first played in my first college jazz recital. After that, the high points would be my first participation in a Philippine movie soundtrack (1977), my first residency in a jazz bar (1980), my first stint as a record producer (1985), and my launch as a solo recording artist (2005)."

Alegre worked in many aspects of the music business in the Philippines as a musician and record producer. In 2002, he formed his own quintet, Affinity, which is considered one of the Philippines' finest jazz combos. Their first album gained a lot of attention in the Philippines and was released on the Candid label as *Jazzhound* in England. "My third album, 3, which I made with Ron McClure and Billy Hart on MCA Music, best represents my playing style." Johnny Alegre holds his own with the Americans, becoming an influential force in the Philippines jazz scene.

**Recommended CDs:** Johnny Alegre's three jazz CDs as a leader are *Jazzhound* (Candid 79842); *Eastern Skies* (Candid 6006), which has Alegre accompanied by the Global Studio Orchestra; and *Johnny Alegre 3* (MCA 75320). A recording in a quartet with percussionist Susie Ibarra, *Humanfolk*, has not yet come out as of late 2012.

**Website:** www.johnnyalegre.com

## Oscar Alemán

b. February 20, 1909, Resistencia, Argentina; d. October 14, 1980, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Oscar Alemán was, in some ways, the Sonny Stitt of the guitar. Stitt was branded as a Charlie Parker imitator in the late 1940s but always claimed that he developed his style independently of Parker. By doubling on tenor, he managed to develop his own musical personality while not compromising his mastery of bebop. Alemán emerged in Europe in the 1930s sounding almost exactly like Django Reinhardt. Ironically, he was 11 months older than Django, but Reinhardt dominated the European jazz scene. While Alemán worked steadily and was also a singer and a dancer, the only way that he could eventually escape the comparison was to return to his native Argentina and continue to grow.