

Guitarist

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Photo: Ann Marsden, 1984

DAVE SNAKER RAY

SEE PAGE 2.

MGS elections coming!

In January, the MGS will be holding elections for the offices of President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary and Membership Coordinator. Officers must be elected from the Board of Directors. But don't let this get in the way of your involvement!

The Board now is largely made up of professional guitarists: teachers, performers, Classical, Jazz and Folk. We would very much like the involvement of those in the real world who may possess organizational and production

skills. We are in particular need of someone with a talent for bookkeeping, hopefully the owner of a computer, for Treasurer.

The MGS has established itself as a viable non-profit arts organization. We have served an audience eager for innovative expression on the guitar, and done this presenting various styles on this most diverse instrument. We have now been awarded grants from The Metropolitan Arts Council and Honeywell Inc. Your society has also entered into col-

laboration with The Ordway Music Theater and McKnight Foundation and The Upper Midwest Flute Association.

We're on our way, but we need new ideas for programming, for collaboration with other arts organizations and for sources of funding our projects. If you have an interest and skills to share become active. Join the Board of the MGS. Call the Secretary, Stephen Kakos at 472-4732. Our next Board meeting is November 19, 1:00 p.m. ■

Suzuki guitar

by Alan Johnston

One of the first questions parents ask when they are considering guitar lessons for their child is: Is she big enough? Is he old enough? The answers to the first question is yes; there are many small-sized guitars available. The answer to the second question is, yes, why did you wait so long?

Suzuki talent education has arrived for classical guitarists, and the purpose of this article is to explain some of the basic precepts and methods of the Suzuki philosophy. For the record, the Suzuki approach prefers to begin with the very young child, who is still open to anything.

For many years now, Suzuki violin students have been proving that very young children can play the instrument very well. This learning approach is being used worldwide for viola, cello, flute, piano, harp and now guitar.

This past summer, I attended a Suzuki teacher training workshop at the Massachusetts Suzuki Institute. The course was taught by William Kossler, an accomplished guitarist who spent a year in Japan learning how to apply Dr. Suzuki's principles to guitar instruction. What I came away with, after this week of observing many well-known Suzuki instructors, (piano, violin, etc.) was an understanding of why this approach can be so effective. In the following paragraphs I will touch on some of the concepts I learned.

One of these concepts deals with human expectations. When a baby is born, we rarely ever doubt that the child will learn to speak its native tongue fluently. If a teacher and a parent can cooperate to teach the child music in a similar way to his preschool language learning, the results can be phenomenal. In order to put this approach into action, you must proceed from the very first lesson by introducing only one new *small* step at a time. These small steps need to be taught so that each one is mastered before proceeding to the next one. Praise plays a very important role here; every small step is praised and reinforced just as are a baby's first vocalizations.

Parental involvement is crucial. The parent attends every lesson because he/she is the "home teacher." The home teacher must practice with the child every day, using only the methods demonstrated by the teacher in the weekly lesson. This approach helps to avoid the traditional "Suzy won't practice" excuses because the parent and the child are both accountable.

Music reading is temporarily postponed in favor of ear-training and technical development. Suzuki children listen daily to the pieces they are and will be playing. This listening is usually passive rather than active. However, it needs to take place daily for an hour or more while the child plays, rests or works. By removing the obstacle of note-reading in these early stages and by focusing on listening to and mimicking the model, you again simulate the natural assimilation of language by children.

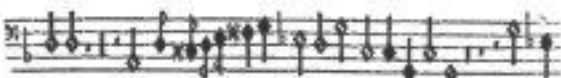
Group lessons are another aspect important to Suzuki Talent Education. In addition to the weekly lesson, the child and parent also attend bi-monthly group lessons where fun, peer group reinforcement occurs. Children of different ages can all attend the group lessons because they focus on review of material already learned. The daily home practice then focuses on the new skill introduced that week, plus review of as much old material as is practical.

The group emphasis of the teacher training (i.e., the summer institutes) and its prominence in the instruction process (group lessons and parental participation) form a support group for the parents, children and teachers. The learning of an instrument is a long, often frustrating process and this continual sharing of ideas gives inspiration and confidence.

Obviously, whatever approach a teacher uses, his or her own technical mastery of the instrument is crucial. The Suzuki Guitar Method is still in the early stages compared with some other instruments; for this reason the teacher training course I attended was often a fas-

inating exchange of ideas about guitar pedagogy. The first volume of the method has been printed but has not yet been published. (It is available to teacher trainees and their students.) If the subsequent volumes (there may be six eventually) are well thought out and carefully ordered, I have no doubt that

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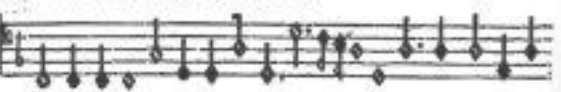
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Dave Ray plays blues on the side

by Emily Kretschmer

This is the first of a two-part article, the second half of which will appear in the January issue of Guitarist.

"Snaker" Ray: the maverick

Dave Ray got the nickname "Snaker" because of the way he danced. The fourth verse of John Koerner's tune "Good Time Charlie"—*Don't try to dance like Snaker Ray. The last time I tried I got thirty days . . .* alludes to the movement as a form of jeopardy.

"That's how I got my nickname," Ray confirmed. "From the way I danced. But I don't dance anymore. So it's irrelevant."

Who gave it to you? I asked.

"Koerner," he replied. "Those were the nickname days," Ray said. "But these are the eighties, and you know, people don't have them anymore."

Certainly blues musicians do, I said.

"You certainly had to have one before. I don't know if it's so essential now," Ray said.

Common curiosity made me ask for further explanation.

"Well, I never went into therapy with Koerner," Ray said. "I'm sure there was some other stuff behind it. It was kind of a spontaneous naming. For instance, his name, Spider, came from a co-worker in a paint factory. He got the name from the way he used to climb around on the shelves and get the various mixes of paint. But he is tall, and has long arms and legs."

I'd heard Koerner got his name from the way he walked down the street, I said. So there apparently are various stories around.

"Well," Ray replied, "I'm sure there are numerous people out there who would ascribe different reasons why I would be called Snaker besides the way I dance. What can I say?"

He's a forthright man, though like his nickname, by virtue of character alone, Ray remains largely enigmatic. After all, what is a white guy like him doin' playin' the blues? The answer he accompanied with a soulful laugh. "I'm a blues guy. An itinerant blues guy who happened to stay in the same town."

He bought James (his father) Ray's insurance agency (James Ray Associates) in 1981. "It's a dinosaur in the industry," Ray said. Which makes him a maverick in more than one sense. Not only is he one of the only white guys performing traditional blues locally, Ray operates a nearly extinct kind of business—and he does both in an era of in-

creasing standardization and conformity.

Ray has a 19 year-old daughter, Nadine, and a 20 year-old son, Barnaby, by his former marriage. Nadine is studying guitar, Ray said, and listens by preference to the blues. Barnaby, who studied saxophone for a while, shows innate musical ability, Ray said. "He listens to 'chainsaw kinda tunes, head-bangers.'" Neither Nadine or Barnaby is currently intent on a musical career. Ray makes his home in St. Paul with Barnaby, and his partner of 10 years, Mary Jane Mueller.



Dave Ray, 1983

Photo: Ann Marsden

Ray's paternal and maternal grandmothers both sold pianos and he took piano lessons from what seemed like "day one." He was taught to play by rote and it carried over. He would later learn blues by memorizing, without any kind of theoretical understanding.

"Each time I heard a blues tune it struck me as being a completely unique, stand-alone item," Ray said, "until somebody pointed out to me that there was something called twelve bars, and I started attempting to count them."

Ray had only a few normal lessons on guitar. One of his grandmothers took him to a Segovia concert at Northrop Auditorium when he was 14. He was "pinned to the wall," "knocked out," Ray said, and decided to play guitar. He took a classical lesson or two.



Dave Ray with Nadine, 2, and Barnaby, 3, 1973.

Photo: Dan Seymour

Around the same time (mid-fifties) he was exposed to the blues. John K. Sherman, former longtime *StarTribune* music writer and father of Ray's friends John and Kiki, had "tons of records—review copies—and some esoteric tapes," said Ray. And his friends Steve and Charlie Thomes (Steve's also a guitar player) had old Folkways and Stinson Leadbelly recordings. Ray and Steve listened to these and picked tunes off the records. "He [Steve] had a remarkable facility for pickin' them off the record. He'd listen to a tune and play it," Ray said.

Why the blues? Why so struck by the blues? "Maybe there was something about the immediacy of the form that attracted me," Ray said. "I found something about it very appealing. Other people obviously didn't, because all my life I've been hearing, 'Well, what's a white guy like you doin' singin' the blues?' . . . But none of the black people I know have ever said to me 'What are you doin' singin' the blues?' I don't know whether it's because they don't consider that I do sing the blues, or they don't know that I do, or whether it's just immaterial to them." It's not a controversy Ray stirs up. "Like I don't set myself up to give tutorial lessons in the blues to emerging black students who haven't heard any of it at home," he said.

"The blues just struck a resonant note. I listened to the stuff. A lot of it I found to be incredibly humorous. A lot of it is direct. There's nothing phony about it. It's always a real direct statement. I was attracted to the lyrics as much as I was to the rhythmic complexity or the instrumental side of it.

"I'm just a regular old white guy from Minnesota who likes the blues. I suppose I could just as easily have gotten involved with Bach as Leadbelly. It just didn't happen," Ray said.

He graduated from University High School, an experimental school designed to "educate educators." The curriculum was definitely non-traditional. If the fundamentals were there, Ray didn't get them, he said. He remembers more about the social milieu than

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the scholastic program. While in high school he was constantly playing. "Wherever I went I took my guitar and just played whether anybody wanted to hear it or not," Ray said. That included rent parties, "party parties," and the Ten O'Clock Scholar and Mel Lasley's two coffeehouses, The Coffee Break and The Bastille, over on Oak and Washington. The West Bank still had polka bands or '50s rock 'n roll or something, according to Ray, but since nobody ever went over there until the sixties, he wasn't exactly sure. "Dinkytown," Ray said, "was the intellectual center of the universe."

After graduating from high school, Ray attended the University of Minnesota, where he studied English and history. He'd met blues harpist Tony Glover through the Minnesota Folk Society, and he lived for a while with guitarist John Koerner. He moved to New York and the three musicians regrouped out east. By the early '60s, the wayfarers had returned to the Twin Cities. Soon they recorded their first LP at a homemade studio in Wisconsin, and following that KR&G performed at folk festivals nationwide, including appearances in Philadelphia, and at Newport in '65. Then for eight years, Ray produced records for and with friends on his own label, Sweet Jane Ltd., in Cushing, Minnesota. But this is a long story completely described by Koerner and/or Ray and/or Glover themselves on the independently-produced video "Blues, Rags & Hollers," available from Little Sun Productions, c/o Vermillion Productions, 2919 S.E. Como Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55414.

Although KR&G did a gig together in Bayfield as recently as September, '89, Ray said, "It's a non-entity. There's no effort afoot nor does there seem to be any interest in reviving the entity KR&G. There never was any point to it in the first place. All we did was occupy the stage simultaneously."

Plenty of folks saw it differently, though. John "Spider" Koerner, Dave "Snaker" Ray and Tony "Little Sun" Glover performed and recorded traditional blues and "impressed a whole legion of rock stars, singers, writers, blues cats and folk rambler," commented Martin Keller in "The Koerner, Ray and Glover Saga" (*Sweet Potato*, April 1-15, 1981: Vol. 2, No. 28).

In 1982 and '83, KR&G was named Best Folk Group locally, and in 1985, they received the Hall of Fame Award from the Minnesota Music Academy.

"The church of the blues"

Ray and Tony Glover had already been playing St. Anthony East on Saturday nights for a couple of years when in '85, Ray decided to invite some other people to sit in. It resulted in a regular thing. "For a while," he said, "we

had a hell of a routine going on. It was multiple horns and everything. The last two years or so it's settled into a more defined personnel."

The Volunteers of the Blue Knight were formed—Dave Ray (lead and rhythm guitar), John Gravlin (harmonica), Max Ray and Rochelle Becker (tenor saxophones), Jeff Stemmerman (rhythm and lead guitar), Tony Glover (rhythm guitar), Bernie Didier (bass) and Galen Michaelson (drums). These men and a woman play the weekly gig free, or for whatever rewards they might gain, which are mostly not monetary.

"It's a social gathering rather than a musical trip," said Ray. "We're not in it to try to make any big statement or anything, or define ourselves as a current band. We're just doing it because we want to do it."

Ray maintains St. Anthony East is one of the few venues, if not the only, where you can hear traditional R&B with "that spontaneous rent party kind of atmosphere that occasionally comes up at St. Anthony. It's more of a predictable gig now than it was a few years ago," Ray said, "but there was a real spontaneity to it before, and there's still some of that now."

I told Ray going to St. Anthony East was like going to church on Saturday night—a lot of the same congregation in the bar, and something happening there that felt like being in church.

"The church of the blues," he said, laughing.

A lot of the lyrics in blues get down and dirty, and they're about pretty down-to-earth kind of stuff, so where was this sacred aspect of the blues coming from, I wanted to know.

"There's been a lot of discussion from day one," Ray said, "from the intellectual side—criticism of the nature of the blues. Really all

it is—it's just a particular form of expression the way that lyric poetry is. It's just a simple-minded, expressionistic way of talking, you know? It's a formulaic deal. Line A, line A again, line B. You end up rhyming it. So it's a pretty simple poetic formula. Now the subject matter is what people get into."

Ray then described a common misconception about the blues. "People go well, uh, blues. I feel happy tonight. Let's not go listen to the

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blues. It's got this cachet of being about depressing circumstances or bad situations between men and women, bad living situations, bad whatever. But there's a lot of so called blueses that are by formula blues that are perfectly happy, up-tempo jumps.

"The spiritual side of it, though, is the same as it is with any pursuit, with any art—music, poetry, writing—any downhill skiing kind of art. It's just self-expression. That's the spiritual side of it. The expression of the person who's doing it. And some people call that art, and some people call it spirit, and some people call it a job. There's as much room in an auto mechanic to express the things that get expressed by a blues singer."

Ray said he didn't want to sound "high falutin'," but playing the blues has become a spiritual pursuit. "I was born and raised a Catholic, but I'm no longer an active Catholic. The definition or the idea of a higher power is to me another way of expressing extension of self," Ray said, "and when I'm actively engaged in pursuing the muse, whether it's writing a tune, playing the tune by myself, playing the tune in front of people, or thinking about it while I'm driving along, it's an opportunity to expand my view of myself. It's a way to step away from yourself, look at yourself, and see what you're doing. Which is what religion is all about, I guess, or what god is all about, right? It's supposed to give you some third-party interpretation of what you're doing, right?"



Ways of seeking personal fulfillment and unification with the world and God are as diverse as cultures and sub-cultures around the globe. Within our inherited or preferred religion or mythology (or music) we find not only meaning (an experience of life and death through symbology, ritual and sharing), but a way of coming alive. These are not my ideas, but those of the late Joseph Campbell, writer and lecturer in the field of mythology.

Theories about blues music ramble the gamut, defining it as a reflection of a fundamental human desire to unite with the world and God; as being culturally distinct but universally relevant; political, not purely aesthetic, and vice versa; and liberating, of the collective as well as the individual.

But no matter where you're coming from, the blues celebrate life—sorrow and bliss. Blues tunes are, after all, about life and death—suffering, betrayal, injustice, violence, joy, love, atonement and victory. And these things are united in the blues in a cry, or a shout, or a voice and a song so powerful that it becomes an exhilarating, liberating force.

Playing and singing the blues is a cathartic experience, Ray said, in the traditional sense of the word. "It works the poisons out of your system, or however you want to paraphrase

the classical meaning of it. It's a way to act out."

"Anytime that you give voice to something, obviously you're liberating it some way or another," Ray said. "Or you're reconfining it in a different structure. You're letting go of it to some extent."

"It doesn't matter whether you're playing Flamenco or blues. Whatever you're playing is what you know from a technical standpoint, but it's also the aim of what you're trying to do with it, and what I'm trying to do with it is to relieve my own internal pressures. If someone else wants to come along for the ride, then they're welcome to join me."

In an essay on the blues written by Rod Gruver ("The Blues as Secular Religion," in *Downbeat's 15th Yearbook*, 1970), the author quotes James Baldwin: "If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer and more loving." And that is the central message and purpose of the blues," Gruver wrote, "its reason for being: 'to make us larger, freer and more loving.'"

"Yeah, that's what they said about Michelangelo, and that's what they said about Picasso, and that *is* the blues," Ray said. "That freeing up of expression. The more you get out of yourself [in the Zen sense], the closer you get to god, is what it amounts to. So people try it by getting high. They try it by doing art. It just seems like this might be more godly than dropping acid. Playing blues might be easier on you than dropping acid. You know what I'm saying?"

The instances of musicians who crossed over between blues and spiritual music, which, Ray explained, are harmonically, melodically and rhythmically parallel, point to some of the disparities and links between the sacred and secular musical forms.

"There's always been a black differentiation between spiritual music and blues music," Ray said, "and those involved in the spiritual sector always had it in for those involved in the blues sector and considered it simple music."

"As a matter of fact, there are quite a few schizophrenic blues models in the back of old issues of some original OJL and RBF records, with the same artist doing a side of spirituals and a side of blueses. They would talk in interviews about singing spirituals at a certain point—certain geographical and time spot—and singing blueses next night at the sukey jump. That dichotomy has always existed between the spiritual and the blues."

"I suppose you could make up a model [to examine the crossovers] and study it by application, and you might be able to make a case for the fact that blacks lived in a certain structured environment and certain behaviors were allowed under one way of life, and certain behaviors weren't allowed under another way of life, and part of it included the musical domain, or whatever. I mean, you could make up that whole thing and you could support it with evidence one way or another. But probably the fact of the matter is, that given the structure of the blues music itself, you could sing spirituals to a blues format, but if there already existed a spiritual format, which there did, then you'd probably elect to use that one."

"So that's what's happening," Ray said. "There's more than one way to express yourself, and it just depends on which corner of the culture you're coming from, what you end up doing."

Thanks to the folks at the Luxton Neighborhood Center, where the interview for this article was conducted.

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"GHOST, n. The outward and visible sign of an inward fear."

—Ambrose Bierce

I don't consider myself all that spiritual, but I've read a bit, and I have my theories. Listening to Syd Barrett recently, I thought of Dickens' Scrooge and the ghosts who came to visit him, forcing him to travel through his own past, present and future. Ghosts, I decided, are merely reflections of their observers—and perhaps some of Scrooge's specters were things Dickens saw in his own looking glass . . .

Barrett's songs are grand ghosts. Like a corridor of winter elms, naked arches over a hushed boulevard, all grey. It seems he did not really write them; rather, they came to him as visitations. And as their melodies traverse your speakers they surround you in a rapt, haunting grip. Meaning and context may elude you at first—but relax. Let Syd take you back through your own secret galleries of images.

He found fame in the Summer of Love in his native England. He had a band which he named after his two favorite blues artists, Pink Anderson and Floyd Council.

Pink Floyd were like an English Grateful Dead, freely mixing extended space-jams with Barrett's 3-minute psycho-candy pop songs. As they gained a wide audience, Syd unfortunately lost his equilibrium and was "retired." He still lives today—allegedly as a recluse in a Cambridge basement.

With this year's release of *Opel* (Harvest SHSP 4126), Barrett fans can get tantalizing new insights into their hero's erratic genius.

In the title track, the mystic nobility of ancient races is celebrated on a grey and desolate shore, while we're reminded of the cycle of death, decay and regeneration which is our earthly lot. Employing an eerie chord progression and seemingly random rhythms,

Syd gives us a kind of postlude to psychedelia—maybe a requiem—hypnotic, visionary, wistful. In short, pure Barrett. He'll dwell in a chosen chord till he's exhausted it, then submit you to a flurry of quick changes. The long instrumental break is like Philip Glass meeting the hurdy-gurdy man; you can almost hear the ukulele that Barrett strummed as a youngster. Try to follow this on your own guitar, and you'll find yourself playing it for hours—better than meditation! In spirit and in lyric content, "Opel" may evoke, in the literary listener, certain of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* . . .

The earliest recorded version of "Octopus" follows, featuring members of Soft Machine as the back-up band. To those familiar with the later, polished version on *The Madcap Laughs*, this track will be quite a curiosity—even amusing, in places, as the band makes desperate efforts to sync with Barrett's unpredictable timing and changes.

The new Harvest LP consists mainly of such rarities. There are stripped-down demos, session takes from Barrett's solo albums, tracks formerly available only as bootlegs, and a handful of songs never released before. All have been re-mastered, with beautiful results. Even if you spent \$20 on the *El Syd* set of boot singles in 1986, you should run out and buy *Opel* today—if you're a true Barrett devotee.

Many stories are told about Syd's antics with the fledgling Floyd—to the point where the man's life tends to overshadow the body of work he's left us. A tragic hero, a bold psychic explorer who recognized no limits in art or life . . . It's too easy to enjoy Barrett records for that superficial, vicarious thrill of madness. ("Like, out there, ma-a-a-ann . . .")

"Rats," with its dark distorted blues motifs, is a song to shatter anybody's romantic notions about Barrett's inner chaos. The *Opel* LP provides a stark un-dubbed take in which all the torrent of language is audible—and terrifying. While many Barrett songs are full of innocence and yearning, "Rats" stands apart as a tirade of cynicism, anger, physical degradation and disgust.

It is *not* about madness, though—or even the fear of madness. Ignoring cerebral quagmires, its images are concrete, tactile, sensual. All of them. If you know the Barrett catalogue, stop and think about it and you'll realize this is true of most of his songs.

It's easy to accept Syd as the lunatic in Roger Waters' head (Floyd's "Brain Damage,"

1974), but we must also remember that it was in fact Waters who took it upon himself to articulate that lunacy. Barrett remained, to the end of his short career, singularly earth-bound, using nature and the four elements as his primary lyrical sourcebook. His compositions are formed along an intensely personal aesthetic which is romantic, pagan, symbolist, and 21st century schizoid all at once. The man's biggest struggle (artistically speaking) was not against looming insanity. It was a struggle, rather, to give expression to his own peculiar *sanity* . . .

We can hear the Great God Pan bustling the hedgerows behind vintage Floyd tunes like "Flaming," "The Gnome," "The Scarecrow," "Matilda Mother," and "See Emily Play"—but after Syd's departure in '68 the band gradually abandoned this ancient earthly magic in favor of inner and outer-

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space exploration, challenging the values of the Cold War world.

Barrett's musical inspiration clearly derives from a wealth of sources. Delta blues, classical/symphonic, pre-metal grunge, '60s pop, Eastern traditions, the rollicky nonsense of old British music halls—all these styles and more can be detected in his work. And lyrically he was just as impulsive, sometimes veering from the lucid to the obscure in a single breath.

To hear this strange facility of his at its best, listen closely to *Opel's* beautiful "Word Song." It is a litany of richly evocative words strung together, words related by sound if not meaning, a lavish catalogue of things that stimulate the senses—and the mind. Precious stones, woods and metals, perfumes, fabrics, flora and fauna slide into casual juxtaposition with abstract nouns and the tools of science. The soft is paired with the hard and glittery, as are nature with artifice, animate with inanimate, ethereal with sensual . . . And as a setting for these linguistic gems, a simple understated acoustic guitar, lovingly milking the same chord till the exquisite turnaround . . .

Sounds like a turn-of-the-century symbolist experiment? Maybe. Barrett's literary influences are hard to guess at, today. In 1970 he told an interviewer, "I don't read much . . ." Yet one listens to him, and cannot help but recall the words of Rimbaud: to be a poet, to be a visionary, "it's a matter of arriving at the unknown by the disordering of all the senses . . . And too bad for the piece of wood that finds itself one day made into a violin!"



A hundred years lie between that declaration and the release of Syd Barrett's second—and last—solo album. 1999 is only ten years away. To which turn-of-the-century does Barrett really belong? Is he a 19th century romantic who was born too late? Or simply a man ahead of his time?

DISCOGRAPHY:

- The Madcap Laughs* SABB-11314
- Barrett* SABB-11314
- Opel* SHSP 4126
- with Pink Floyd:
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The story behind slack key

by Stanley Higashi

Perhaps one of the greatest aspects of Hawaiian culture is its music, especially slack key guitar. In 1971, The Hawaiian Music Foundation started to use the term kiho'alu, which means slack key guitar, in a campaign to revitalize the popularity of slack key. Kiho'alu has gained national recognition due largely to Raymond Kaleoalohapoinaolehel-emanu Kane, one of the Masters of the kiho'alu. In 1987, Kane received the Heritage Fellowship Award from the National Endowment for the Arts, a highly prestigious award. Since then, slack key has been introduced to parts of Europe, Japan and Australia, all through the works of Kane. Slack key actually refers to the tuning on a guitar. It is because of the slackening of the strings that beautiful music can be created.

Slack key began as a result of Hawaii's cattle problem on the Big Island back in the 1700's, when cattle were first introduced to the islands. Kamehameha I placed a kapu upon the cattle to allow them to increase in numbers. By the time of Kamehameha III, wild cattle were spreading all over the Big Island, and the problem was getting out of hand. In an effort to take care of the problem, Kamehameha III sent for the vaqueros (cowboys) of Spanish Mexico (California). Along with their techniques to manage the cattle, the vaqueros brought their guitars. The vaqueros formed good ties with the paniolo (Hawaiian cowboys). When it was time for the vaqueros to return home, some of them gave their guitars to the paniolo. The Hawaiians enjoyed what they heard and probably learned a few Spanish tunes and acquired the finger coordination required to play the guitar. The Hawaiians, not being able to sing in the same key of the Spanish tuning, lowered (slackened) the strings to accommodate their vocal ranges. Slack key was thus created. Therefore, it can be concluded that the different tunings of the kiho'alu today represent the different voices of the past.

Kiho'alu uses a number of tunings. One of the most common is called taro patch (D G D G B D). The first note corresponds to the 6th (bass) string on the guitar. This is probably the most versatile of all slack key tunings. Another tuning is the wahine tuning (D G D F# B D), named after the late Alice Namakelua, who often used this tuning. While the taro patch uses the G for the 3rd string, the wahine tuning uses an F sharp, a half-step lower. Still another kind of tuning is the hiilawe. It is generally tuned in the key of C. The late Gabby Pahinui, one of the greatest slack key players of all time, was an avid user of the hiilawe tuning. One drawback of the kiho'alu is that only a limited number of chords can be played, because of the unique style of tunings. However, the music created from slack key more than makes up for its

chord limitations.

For years, slack key tunings were kept highly secretive. The tunings were shared only within the family. It was virtually impossible for an outsider to attain this secret. When Raymond Kane was a young boy, he faced a similar situation. Although he was intrigued by what he had heard on the beaches of Nanakuli, he was denied the learning of slack key because he was not part of that one man's family. At that time, however, Kane was an excellent diver. So Kane went back to this fellow and traded the fish he had caught for slack key lessons. Today, slack key tunings are no secret.

As far as the technique used in slack key, the same can be found in other types of guitar music. Slack key uses hammer-ons, pull-offs, slides and harmonics (chimes). A hammer-on is the striking of a note to produce the desired tone. A pull-off is just the opposite. From a pressed position, the finger is lifted off the fret to produce a tone. A slide is the smooth movement of the finger from one fret to another on the same string. All of these techniques in slack key prevent the string from being plucked with the right hand (for right-handed players). The last technique is the harmonic or chime. This technique is achieved by placing the finger above a fret, with just the right amount of pressure. The string is then plucked, producing a bell-like tone.

Judging from these techniques, it may seem that slack key is no different than any other kind of music. However, there is more to slack key than techniques and tunings. Slack key employs a lot of finger picking. The rhythm of the bass strings accompanies the melody of the high strings. Another element involved in slack key is its fluidity. The secret to slack key is to keep the music going, according to Kane. The beginnings and endings

of slack key tunes are most important. To keep the fluidity, slides are essential.

Another aspect of slack key is that it is very personal. A lot of feelings and emotions are put into songs. The music comes from within a person. Kane feels that the style of playing and tuning can easily distinguish the slack key artist. The creativity of kiho'alu is generated with the use of the right hand (for right-handed people) and to some extent, the left. While everyone is equipped with the same fretboard for the left hand, the use of the right hand is up to the artists.

Slack key is very much an important part of Hawaiian culture. It was created in the islands and has remained totally Hawaiian. Much of the personality of each slack key artist is reflected in the music. In the case of Raymond Kane, when he received his Heritage Fellowship Award in Washington, D.C., there were others getting awards, as well. However, Kane was the only one to call upon his wife to receive the award with him. No other recipient did such. This surely exemplifies the true aloha spirit of Raymond Kane and Hawaii.

The future of kiho'alu remains in the hands of the younger generation. Kane himself wants to see everybody playing slack key. Because he had such a difficult time trying to learn slack key, he wants no one to experience the same. Today, Raymond Kane teaches the kiho'alu at his home, seven days a week. If slack key is going to be learned, it should be learned from the source, Raymond K. Kane. ■

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The Kakos/Grobert guitar

by John L. Salsini

Some time ago luthier Steve Kakos was struck with the idea of making a 19th-century period guitar. His interest was piqued by his work with the pianofortes in the Schubert Club's collection. He realized that the timbre and rather limited dynamics of Mozart's and Beethoven's time would be much better suited for duets with the guitar than today's more forceful piano.

The possibility of hearing both the period guitar and period piano in consort became an exciting prospect to Kakos. Unfortunately, guitars don't keep as well as pianos. Of the few early 19th-century concert guitars that are still preserved, most are in museums or in the hands of private collectors. Kakos realized that it was up to him to reconstruct a period instrument if such a concert were going to take place in the Twin Cities.

Kakos settled on a French guitar made by Grobert as a model for his reconstruction. This guitar was chosen for two reasons. First of all, it is an excellent example of an early 19th-century concert guitar. Secondly, it has an interesting history that would make the reconstruction more attractive to organizations such as the Schubert Club, which eventually acquired the Kakos/Grobert guitar. The Grobert bears the signatures of Paganini and Berlioz, two very influential figures in the world of music who also had a great love for the guitar. The violin maker Vuillaume lent his Grobert to Paganini when the virtuoso was in Paris. Vuillaume asked Paganini to sign the guitar. Although the ink has faded, one can still make out the great violinist/guitarist's bold hand near the left side of the bridge. Later, Vuillaume presented the Grobert to Berlioz, who signed the guitar on the opposite side of the bridge. Berlioz made a gift of the guitar to the Museum of the National Conservatoire of Music in Paris, when he was the museum's curator.

Following blueprints, notes and photographs obtained from the National Conservatoire, Kakos attempted to reconstruct the original. While the Grobert has rosewood sides and a spruce top like most modern guitars, it has several interesting characteristics that set it apart. For example, the neck is completely veneered with ebony and the fingerboard is level with the top, not raised like today's guitars. Also, the Grobert is considerably smaller than its modern counterpart—about two inches smaller in length, width and depth. The original is modestly decorated. The elaborate and startling ornaments of the baroque guitar are not found on this guitar from the Classical Period—an age which held the ideals in balance, unity and simplicity. The Grobert has a delicate inlay pattern of alternating ebony and ivory for its rose and the outer edge of its top. For economic and ethical reasons Kakos substituted maple for the

ivory in his reconstruction. Meanwhile, Jeffrey Van was anxiously watching Kakos's project. For some time, he had longed to experience the music of that period on an original guitar. Van had played and heard the music of Giuliani, Sor, Diabelli, Paganini and all the other great guitar composers for many years, yet he felt that the modern guitar was just not capable of capturing the essence of their music. The Kakos/Grobert guitar would give Van the opportunity to prove his suspicions.

Van took hold of the guitar in the spring of last year. He was immediately impressed as well as surprised. The guitar had remarkable projection and "punch"—a rather unexpected capability for such a small guitar. More importantly, that little something that was missing on the modern guitar was found on the Kakos/Grobert. Arpeggios, Alberti-bass figures, repeated notes and scales, mainstays of 19th-century guitar music, were now much more effective. Van attributes this to the definition of the note. The front end of the note is much clearer, while the sustain is diminished. There is more of an "edge" to the

KAKOS/GROBERT to 10

SUZUKI from 2

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Alan Johnston is a past president of the Minnesota Guitar Society. He is a guitar instructor at the MacPhail Center for the Arts and at the Musical Offerings program of Minnetonka Community Services.

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KAKOS/GROBERT from 9

note, as opposed to the modern guitar's blending of notes. However, the guitar is still capable of maintaining a continuous sonority for accompaniment passages.

The Kakos/Grobert's timbre is a bit drier than the warm, lush sound of today's guitar. It takes the music to a lighter plane, or using Van's own words, "it sparkles." This makes it the perfect companion for the 19th-century pianoforte. The rich, romantic sound of the modern keyboard isn't found on the period instrument. The notes have greater definition and less sustain. The similarities in sound quality between the two period instruments were apparent in the Weber Divertimento for Guitar and Piano, Op. 38, performed last May by Van and pianist Rees Allison on the Hill House Parlor Concert Series. Several audience members commented that they had difficulty distinguishing one instrument from

the other. (The pianoforte used in the concert was an 1830s Kisting, which had been played by Brahms as well as Schumann and his talented wife, Clara). The Hill House concert, which also featured the guitar on works by Paganini and Vivaldi, was met with such warm reviews that the Kakos/Grobert will be featured on three more concerts this season: Nov. 6th, Feb. 19th and May 7th.

Van had little difficulty adjusting to the smaller guitar, which was a pleasant surprise. He had to raise his footstool somewhat to make up the difference in the guitar's width. His most difficult problem occurred with the right hand. Because the guitar's neck was level with the top, the strings were considerably closer to the rose. Van caught himself striking the guitar's top with his fingernail as he attempted to pluck the string. However, through concentration and a little self-discipline, the problem was easily avoided.

The Twin Cities area should consider itself lucky that it is home to the Kakos/Grobert guitar. Hearing 19th-century music on period instruments is not only a great pleasure and enlightening, but is extremely rare—especially on the guitar. Don't miss hearing the guitar this season. Also, although the plans have not been finalized, the guitar should be on display at the Schubert Club sometime this year. ■

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EVENTS Nov-Dec

- 1 NOV**.....An evening of contemporary steel string guitar played by **Steve Haskin** at the New Riverside Cafe.
- 2 NOV**.....7:30 p.m. The Schubert Club Authentic Instrument Series in Courtroom 317, Landmark Center, 75 W. 5th St., downtown St. Paul. This concert will feature music of von Weber and Schubert. **Jeffrey Van** will be performing on a copy of a 19th century guitar. For ticket info call 292-3267.
- 3 NOV**.....Solo recital of classical guitar music performed by **Nick Rath** at St. John's University, Collegeville.
- 5 NOV**.....2:00 p.m. O'Shaughnessy Auditorium, on the campus of St. Catherine's College, St. Paul. This orchestra concert will feature a Vivaldi concerto in G for TWO guitars played by **Joan Griffith** and **Chris Kachian**. A free event.
- 6 NOV**.....7:30 p.m. The Hill House Chamber Players will begin their 1989-90 season at the J.J. Hill House, 240 Summit Av., St. Paul. The program will feature the Giuliani Serenade Op. 19 for guitar, violin and cello as well as several guitar solos by Turina played by **Jeffrey Van**. Seating is limited and reservations are recommended. Call 296-8205.
- 8 NOV**.....8:00 p.m. Brady Auditorium, College of St. Thomas, St. Paul. A classical guitar recital by **Tony Titus**.
- 12 NOV**.....Classical guitarist **Jim McGuire** will give a Faculty Recital at St. Olaf's in Northfield. Music by Bach, Villa-Lobos and it's free and worth the trip.
- 14 NOV**.....7 p.m. A solo recital by **Jeffrey Van** at Augustana Lutheran

Church. 1400 S. Robert St. W. St. Paul. FREE.

- 15 NOV**.....**Steve Haskin** will play from 12 to 1 p.m. at Town Square in downtown St. Paul. Bring your lunch, it's free.
- 16-19 NOV**....Jazzman **Jack McDuff** at the Artist Quarter. Call 872-0405.
- 18 NOV**.....8:00 p.m. A solo recital of classical guitar music by **Juan Fernandez** at Ferguson Hall, U of M. Juan will be leaving town soon, so don't miss this chance to hear him.
- 26 NOV**.....3:00 p.m. The "Grand Salon" at 510 Groveland, Mpls. will be the site of a free recital by **Joe Hagedorn** featuring music for guitar and violin, with S.P.C.O. violinist Leslie Shank.
- 26 NOV**.....7:00 p.m. **Leo Kottke** in his annual concert at the Ordway. This one usually sells out early. Call 224-4222 for Tix.
- 26 NOV**.....7:30 p.m. Yep, there are 3 events going on this date!—the **3rd MN Guitar Society guitar forum**. Free at the New Riverside Cafe.
- 4 DEC**....."A Narada Christmas" at the Guthrie Theater. The Narada record label has three or four guitarists on their list. Call 377-2224 for tickets.
- 6 DEC**.....**Steve Haskin** will perform contemporary steel string guitar music at the New Riverside Cafe.

12 DEC.....**Joe Hagedorn** will perform the Concierto De Aranjuez by Rodrigo with the River Falls Community Orchestra at River Falls Community College. Call 874-7406 for info.

17 DEC.....7:30 Heartstone: **Country Christmas with Stony Lonesome** at O'Shaughnessy Aud. Call 690-6700 for tickets.

26 DEC.....8:00 p.m. **Michael Johnson** in concert at Orchestra Hall an annual event for friends and fans. Call 371-5656.

6 JAN.....**John Roth** album release party/concert at Janet Wallace Fine Arts Aud. at Macalester College, St. Paul—more details next issue.



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