

Guitarist

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 1989

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VOL. V NO. 1

Part Two: Women Guitarists

Judy Larson

SCOTT DAVIES SPEAKS WITH
DAKOTA DAVE HULL

SEE PAGE 5

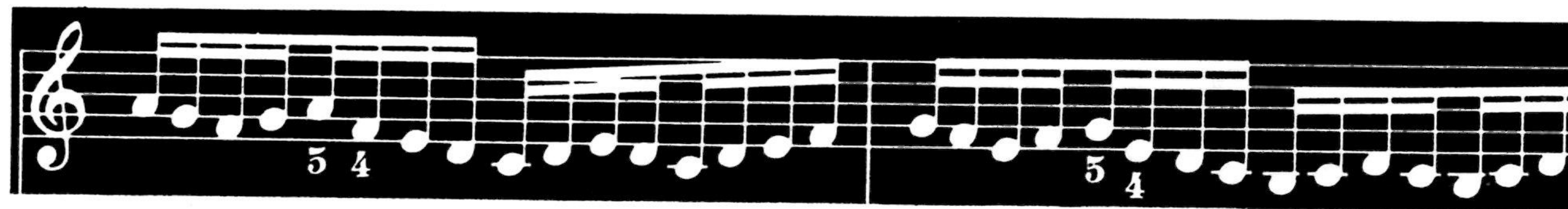


Outgoing President's letter

*"When in charge, ponder
When in trouble, delegate
When in doubt, mumble"*

Friends, it is with a bird's nest in my heart that I come to you. Loyal readers, my term has come to an end. I leave with mixed feelings. I would like to continue and devote more time to the M.G.S.; however, my other commitments have caused the amount of time I can devote to diminish to a degree not compatible with the demands of the job.

Although I have been criticized during my presidency, I do not feel any resentment toward my detractors. It is inevitable, even desirable, in an organization like ours, to cri-



timize the leadership. It indicates that there are fresh ideas, possible new directions, and motivation (as opposed to idle grumbling); in a nutshell: potential leadership.

A good president must be fair, but also driven by a vision. All we can hope is that this vision, if realized, will be beneficial to the M.G.S., the musical community, the guitar as an instrument, and not only to the president and officers of the organization. Until our organization has more input from non-professional musicians, we must tread on this thin line between self-furtherance and self-sacrifice.

Having begun in a rather serious way, I will continue by saying that I think this past year

has been very good for the society. I think that the level of success of our events and of our newsletter has risen rather dramatically. For better or for worse, we have probably, in the three or four years since our inception, exceeded the expectations of our founding strummers. What next?

In closing, I would like to thank (as should the entire membership) Charlie Lawson, Steve Kakos, Scott Davies, Steve Haskin, Carol Kenfield, Will King and Pat McCarty for the many hours of volunteer work they have done. Best of luck to the new officers and board members. Happy New Year!

—Alan Johnson
Past President M.G.S.

Upcoming Events you won't want to miss

JANUARY 8 *With Strings Attached*—Jazz Guitar at the Emporium of Jazz in Mendota, 3-7pm. This event features Dean Granros, Ron Brown and Reuben Ristrom with host Leigh Kamman. The M.G.S. is co-sponsoring these performances with the Twin City Jazz Society. Call 633-3134 for more information.

JANUARY 29 *Forum at the Guitar Center* (304 N. Washington Avenue), 3pm. Featuring Egyptian musicians performing on their traditional instruments (oud, tabla, dumbek).

This informative and lively presentation warrants everyone's attendance. Please do.

FEBRUARY 19 *Forum at the Guitar Center* (304 N. Washington Avenue), 3pm. Just back from their East Coast tour, Dakota Dave Hull and Cam Waters will astonish and entertain with their unique flat picking excursions. See the article on page 5 for more information on Dave Hull.



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cover photo (Judy Larson),
Larry Marcus, 1987



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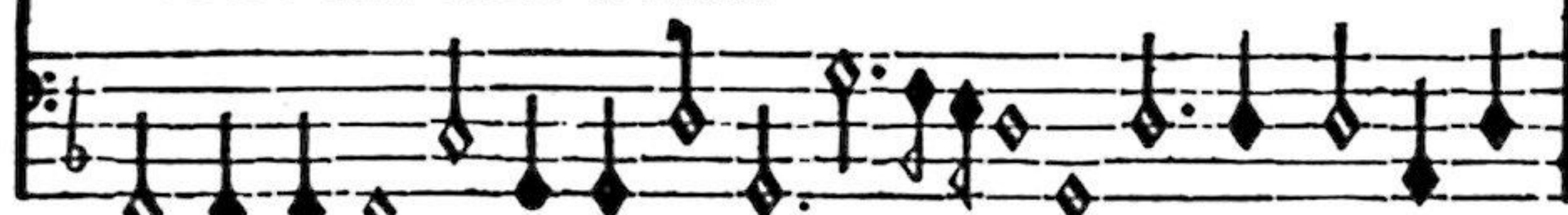
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Judy Larson & Bill Hinkley



This article is
the second
in a
series
exploring
local
women
guitarists.

Partners in
the local
folk
music
scene for
roughly
two
decades,

Judy and Bill agreed:

A story of one without the other was simply inconceivable.

BY EMILY KRETSCHMER

photo by Larry Marcus, 1987

JUDY LARSON sat opposite Bill Hinkley at a round table in a busy West Bank restaurant and graciously accepted Hinkley's complimentary assessment of her guitar playing: "She's so solid I can't go wrong." Quietly, professionally, maybe slightly tongue-in-cheek, Larson nodded, and responded, "Thank you. Thank you so much."

"You do so many things right," Hinkley said to Larson. "You've got a great sense of timing, a great sense of dynamics, and a great way of creating, and interacting with what's going on."

(If you could listen to this conversation rather than read it, you'd hear not only the warmth of its message, but also that of the rich tones of Hinkley and Larson's voices.)

"What I do is not too difficult," Larson said humbly.

"You try to encourage, give a relief, create a backdrop for the vocal section," continued Hinkley. "That Judy does really well. She kind of needs longer fingers," he noted.

I laughed until I noticed five tiny little digits go up and spread like a fan.

"And I have a wide neck guitar, too," Larson sighed, looking at her small hand.

"I don't know how you do it," I said.

"I don't know either, sometimes," acknowledged Larson. "But even Segovia had little beer-can fingers, little short stubby fingers."

Larson plays two old Martin guitars, one a triple-octave 28, made in 1928, and a smaller, single-octave 21, made in 1929. "They have beautiful tones," said Larson, "but they're always temperamental to tune . . . They made the bridge a little different. The battle on the bridge was straight across in those days and it didn't take into account the thick strings. Today they're on a slant to accommodate thick strings. That makes it feel different when you actually press down on the strings. If you've got a thin string over here and a thick string here, your note on the thick string will go sharp. Your thin string might be in tune . . . They have beautiful sound . . . The sound makes you discover things. The sound makes your fingers look for notes."

Hinkley also expressed his appreciation for the sound of a fine guitar. "I really, really love the way those chords sound, like that, one after the other. Each note sounds so good, it sets up the next." He plays his 1938 Epiphone Emperor "almost exclusively now," he said. "It belonged to Bellson," noted Larson. "Albert Bellson played it." Explained Hinkley, "It came into the hands of Chris Weber over at the Podium, and I traded two guitars and some money." Larson also "picks at the mandolin a little," and Hinkley plays mandolin, banjo and fiddle, too.

Hinkley told me how Larson found his fiddle in a consignment shop. "Judy had seen this instrument, said 'you gotta come and see this.' The place was closed but we look . . . through the glass. I thought it was a good fiddle. We got a little loan. We were short of cash. It's an old German-made fiddle that I've put a lot of money into as time's passed to make it playable. It's a sound I'm still happy with. It's predictable. I know what it's going to do. Fiddles and guitars are very different musical instruments. You'll be able to play somebody else's guitar without too much difficulty. Take somebody else's fiddle—it's like somebody else's shoe. After a while you get used to it, but somebody else's fiddle always feels real funny at first to me."

The Hinkley and Larson repertory, a "catholicity" of styles, as Hinkley called it, spans the borders of cultures, countries, continents and centuries, and includes ballads, blues, bluegrass, calypso, country, and jug-band stomps, to mention a few varieties. The breadth of their repertory is represented on their double album set, "Out In Our Meadow," recorded in 1987, and issued by Red House Records. One side of "Out In Our Meadow" is taken from live broadcasts of *A Prairie Home Companion*, on which Hinkley and Larson at first, regularly, and later, periodically performed for 13 years. The double album, long awaited and highly praised by

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critics, is their first feature recording, but they can also be heard on "A Prairie Home Album", and "A Prairie Home Anniversary Album." They have recorded for the Minnesota Artist Series, and as early as in 1970, they made an album with The Sorry Muthas, the group Hinkley came to Minnesota from Michigan to join, at the suggestion of steel guitar player Cal Hand, a longtime friend.

It was in 1970 that Hinkley met Larson, who had returned to the Twin Cities from sojourns in Denver and Los Angeles ('62) and Boston ('67). She had been playing the coffeehouse circuit, working in a pizza place and Mexican bar in L.A., demonstrating cardboard guitars in Woolworth's in Denver, working in factories in Boston and singing in coffeehouses in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, before returning to the Twin Cities in the late '60s. Larson described the folk music scene that she came home to. "There were coffeehouses in those days. The Coffee Break in a little house on Oak Street. Another coffeehouse over on the farm campus. First it was the Ten O'Clock Scholar Too. It lasted about six months. Then there was a coffeehouse called Kiva (Hopi [Pueblo Indian] lodge). They'd maybe pay you \$5 at the Scholar in Dinkytown, and you sat on the stool in the front window. You started to meet a lot of people who were looking for the same thing. For myself, a lot of people were interested in blues, like Dave Ray, who was a mere tadpole at the time—16 years old and had a paper route," recalled Larson.

Ray, Bill Golfus, John Raybeck, Michael Gooney and Bill Gleason were just some of the early important influences on Larson and Hinkley in the early '70s. They were "beacons," according to Hinkley. Golfus, said Larson, "taught me a lot about music theory and its application, and he was always discovering new music," she said. "He would always turn you on to somebody that you hadn't heard and that you should hear," said Larson. "Willy Murphy," said Hinkley. "Another guy I always enjoy hearing." Added Larson, "None of them have that apartment sound. They're out doin' it. You gotta be able to project. You can be the world's greatest guitar player to yourself, and have wonderful technique, but if you don't get out and do it in noisy places and quiet places—you know, get out and do it—it doesn't jump out."

Larson got her musical start as a small child at home in St. Anthony Park as part of a family that sang and harmonized and entertained for dances. Her aunts gave her stacks of sheet music of popular songs from 1890 on, and she played it on the piano, then picked up the ukulele, and at about 15 or 16, the guitar. "I had a piano teacher and one of her teachers was Edvard Grieg's sister," said Larson. "You can imagine how old she was." Larson learned early on the piano about keeping



photo by Eve MacLeish, 1977

time, interpretation, and "touch," or dynamics. "A lot of that carried over to the guitar," Larson said. "I think my first guitar was \$40 and it was zebra-colored. It was like a demonstrator model. It was the ugliest thing you ever saw. But you could sing those songs . . . You could take it along on picnics, or sneak out of the house." She said the playing and singing attracted attention, which she probably liked, but later in the interview she also told me, "There's so much fun musically when two, three or four people click. It's so much fun. Sometimes it's like riding a wave, it feels so good. God, it feels so good."

The words, as well as the music, carry Larson along. "I see the stuff," said Larson, referring to the imagery of a song. "Where someone else—it's easier for them to see the notes—I see the theme. That's why it's sometimes hard for me to go back and work on technique." Explained Hinkley, "It's kind of a communication thing—with musical mental pictures—to help you communicate better . . . You have to have sort of a two-way third-eye thing when you're singing a song about something. It really helps a song a lot if you have a picture in your mind."

Take the song "Frankie Jeanne," I suggested. Larson did. "Memphis Minnie had to live a much rougher life, and there was bragging in it. She brags in the last verse how she had him [Frankie Jeanne's a horse] in a race once, had \$5,000 bet on Frankie Jeanne. 'Folks, I wasn't scared at all 'cause I know he wasn't gonna turn me loose,'" Larson recited the verse. "'Fore he turned me loose, he run off all his shoes.' Then you play it. When you're playing you can see this big draft horse." Hinkley added, "With a shoe that's a comin' loose on his foot." Larson continued,



"At more of a trot than a gallop really. More of a trot. And there's just something so damn funny about it. People bragged about their horses."

"I've gotta get back and sing this old Memphis Minnie tune," Larson later said, "about how one of these days I'm gonna take the old dirt road home. It's all about a person that's been partying too much for days on end and all we see are people in her bed and in her kitchen eating her food, and all she wants to do is take the dirt road out of there."

Have times changed for Hinkley and

Larson? "There isn't interest in the colleges like there was at one time, which has forced us to be more active in making the music," said Larson. "That was [the nature of] folk music anyway. You played dances, and weddings, services. It was really never made to be played in institutions. We haven't played too many colleges lately." Hinkley added, "We've played one college all year."

"You sing for old people, young people—the way it was intended—so that they don't get the steady diet of schmaltz," Hinkley said, referring to certain types of formulaic contemporary music. "You've seen Stovetop Stuffing or Hamburger Helper or stuff you make where you just add water. That's what you get when you listen to [much of] the music on the radio . . . A guy—I read this in the paper—can't remember who—said, 'If we ate what we listen to, we'd all be dead.' Folk music represents life," said Hinkley, "and it doesn't take a synthesizer and 20 passes on a tape or concentrated remixing."

"We were playing this bar," said Larson, "and this family came in and sat down. 'Do you know any Kenny Rogers or Dottie West?' 'Sorry, we don't.' 'Are you sure you don't know any Kenny Rogers tunes?' Bill would say, 'No, we don't do any Kenny Rogers tunes and Kenny Rogers doesn't do any of our tunes.' Well, they were getting kind of—

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Cleanliness is Next to Godliness

BY SCOTT DAVIES

DAKOTA DAVE HULL's apartment resembles a music store: guitars, cases, music, books, strings, accessories, photos and mementos fill the walls, line the shelves and occupy just about every square inch of space—except for the huge cage housing his nine parakeets. The birds cheerfully chirp in accompaniment to *Hull's Victory*, Dave's 1982 record release, which is spinning on the turntable as we drink coffee and chat.

It's a fine LP, on the Flying Fish label, with virtuosic solo work work ("Whisky Before Breakfast"), great ensemble playing (featuring Butch Thompson, Peter Ostroushko, Mike Cass and others), even a sizzling duet with the legendary Doc Watson.

Dave Hull arrived on the West Bank in the winter of '69-'70 at age 19. He's a true Dakotan, born and raised in Fargo; ("I take pills for it, though.") Primarily self-taught, he relates that he began playing in a folkish, finger-picking style, but soon switched to flat-picking, because "it's the only way I can get the sound, feel and punch I want of my instrument."

Those early days on the West Bank were exciting. There were lots of good young players, a free exchange of ideas and techniques. And there were lots of opportunities to play in small clubs, bars and coffeehouses. He cites Doc Watson as an influence, but also Milton Brown's Band, Cliff Bruner's Texas Wanderers, Bob Wills, Eddie Lang, Hawaiian lap-guitarist Sol Hoopi. "I'm not sure I consider anyone a primary influence but I love their playing," he said. "While there's lots to learn from guitarists, there's lots to learn from other instrumentalists, as well. Take Leo Raley, the mandolinist in Bruner's band of the 1930s: that man changed my life. It's something he did . . . I can't put it into words. He had an approach, a way of looking at music that was different.

"Ted Gowen's style had a lot to do with shaping my playing, particularly my fairly primitive comping style. I use the 6th, 9th and diminished chords, not many major 7ths. When soloing, I try to think melodically, acknowledging the piece's melody. I tend not to use scale patterns, rather I take out the thought process and let it happen. Mine is the non-technical approach."

The 1970s saw Hull working with Peter Ostroushko, later with Eric Peltoniemi. Then, in 1974 he teamed up with Sean Blackburn, forming a duo that was to tour from Boston to Juneau, Alaska, and release three LPs. They stayed together nine years and were fre-

quent guests on Garrison Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion*. Dave says he solidified his style during those years.

"'Cleanliness is next to Godliness,' at least where picking technique is concerned," said Dave. "Pleasing melody, tone, cleanliness of articulation: these are definitely the most important things to me. These, plus a sense of humor. Speed and volume are important because they increase your dynamic range but speed is basically a by product of how much you are playing. If you play daily, your speed will increase.

"The sound of the acoustic guitar is really a beautiful thing. That's what I play for. I don't use a pickup. I've tried all kinds but I hate 'em. You lose your tone and natural sustain.

"I like to play in the morning while drinking my coffee. Basically, I just start playing. I back myself into corners, look for new and exciting escapes. I've never been one for scales or regimen. I don't necessarily recommend my style of playing; for example, sometimes I use my left thumb to fret bass notes, a no-no, but no one ever told me that."

These days, Dave Hull is rehearsing with Cam Winters, an acoustic guitarist living in Red Wing. They're preparing for an East Coast tour in January and February. They'll be doing the small clubs and college circuit and regret that there aren't many places to play locally anymore.

Dakota Dave Hull didn't set out to become a guitar collector. He only collects instruments he likes to play. "For example, my Gibson L-7 archtop—there's no guitar in the world I would trade it for—for any money. I've never found one with its sound and response." The collection consists of about 20 instruments at the moment. Indeed, Dave likes to play them all.

Included are three flattops made by Minneapolis luthier Charles Hoffman, two Gibson flattops, two Gibson archtops, two Charlie Christian-style Gibsons, a National, a Supro Electric, a Martin 0017, two plastic Maccaferri, a Martin Style II uke, a Hawaiian eight-string uke, even a Steinway and Sons Strat-style electric. He also owns a half-dozen vintage Fender and Gibson Amps.

"I'd like to be working steadily as a guitar player. I believe I have something unique to offer, that it's good, and I'd like to make a decent living doing it."

Hear Dakota Dave Hull and Cam Waters on February 19 at the Minnesota Guitar Society's monthly forum. ■

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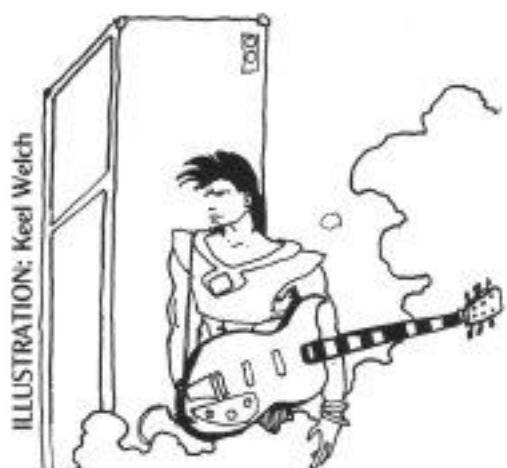
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ROCK NOTES

BY TIM ALEXANDER

PHONE RINGS: "Hello?"

"What you doin'?"

"Ack, sitting here trying to write a piece about guitar players."

"Cool," the lady says. "Who you writing about?"

I shrug, knowing she can't see me. "I don't know . . . Who do you think I should write about?"

"I dunno . . . Eric Clapton, maybe?"

"Pppfth! Obvious, overrated, boorish . . ."

"—but a classic," she stated flatly.

"Hell, he doesn't even use all his fingers. Here's a guy making big money doing beer commercials, and he *doesn't even drink!*" I lit a cigarette. There was a pause.

"Yeah, well, all you listen to is Verlaine—"

"Yeah! He uses all his fingers."

"How 'bout Santana?"

"Great, but he doesn't use all his fingers, either." I took a drag.

"But the first three albums—" she protested.

"Yes," I concluded, "the greatest, I know . . . All his fingers, though . . ." Another lull.

"What about that guy from Def Leppard?"

"Ack, what about him?"

"Damn! You hate everything, don't you?"

"I don't know. I haven't heard everything."

"What about that new guy? Joe—Satch, Sat—"

"Satriani? Yeah, I wish he would've gotten famous about two years ago, so he didn't have to cram all those notes on one album. He should've had the good sense to spread 'em out over two or three records."

"What?!" she cried.

"Yeah, the guy's music should be background for hockey commercials."

"You know, you're a *musical Nazi!*"

"Sieg heil, baby."

"What about Jeff Beck?" she asked.

"We're talking guitar players, not car mechanics," I snapped.

"Jimmy Page?"

"Leave Page outta this!"

"He's sloppy—"

"Sloppy but sincere."

"Did you see that Led Zep reunion at the Atlantic Records Anniversary Party?"

"No!" I lied, and took another drag off my smoke.

"It was disgraceful . . ."

"Probably," I said. "Led Zep, Led Zep, Led Zep—that's all I hear about, damn! They've been broken up for eight years, it's all part of this popular nostalgia neuralgia—it sucks!"

"What about Hendrix?"

"He was great, now he's dead," I declared. "He's been out of the running for eighteen-odd years."

"OK, Mr. Critic," she said with an edge of irritation. "Who do you like?"

"What, this week? Get a pencil!"

"Shoot," she said. I snuffed my smoke in the ashtray, exhaled.

"#1: Richard Lloyd, both albums—most of which I've never heard. Imports from Sweden.

"#2: Bob Mould of Husker Du, constricted yet sublime.

"#3: Lou Reed. Bad but consistent.

"#4: Verlaine, always Verlaine.

"#5: Charlie Bingham, he's unbeatable."

"What about Steve Vai?" she interrupted.

"'Crossroads,' album by P.I.L., 'Eat 'em and Smile,' wonderful stuff! It speaks for itself."

"Oh, is he sacred or something?"

"As Verlaine, sweetheart."

"Well, who else?"

"The three Micks," I replied, "Ralphs, Ronson, and Taylor. You can hear some damn good playing on all those '70s albums—y'know, Mott the Hoople, Bad Company, old Bowie, 'Sticky Fingers' vintage Stones . . . All that stuff is forgotten now, or ignored, or exploited for nostalgia's sake! Rock guitar is twang-bar drag queens, or people your dad's age milking the hell out of their careers which, for the most part, have gone on too long."

"I think you're generalizing far too much," she said.

"Well, as a guitar player I don't want to be lumped in with the likes of Slash from Guns n' Roses, or that Satriani character . . . And I

ROCK NOTES to 12



NOTES from Gene's Desk

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"Guitar Plus Guitar:" A classical guitar symposium

The University of Minnesota School of Music will host a symposium April 7 through 9 focusing on the guitar in ensemble.

Concerts, coaching sessions and discussions will feature Jeffrey Van and Robert Guthrie, guitar duo, the Minneapolis Guitar Quartet, guitarist-composer James McGuire and several School of Music graduate students. Also included will be displays of guitars and guitar music by luthier Stephen Kakos and Podium Music.

Highlighting the symposium will be works for guitar solo, duo, trio and quartet by featured composer Loris Chobanian, who will discuss the specific works as well as special considerations in guitar composition.

Mr. Chobanian is professor of composition and guitar at the Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatory. A successful symphonic composer with a doctorate in composition, Chobanian has won many ASCAP awards and has received commissions from the Cleveland Ballet, the Ohio Chamber Orchestra and the American Wind Symphony, among others. He has enriched the guitar repertoire with numerous solo and ensemble works, in-

cluding a concerto.

The centerpiece of the event will be a concert on April 8 at the Ordway Theatre in St. Paul by the Van/Guthrie Duo and the Minneapolis Guitar Quartet.

The Minnesota Guitar Society is a co-sponsor of "Guitar Plus Guitar," and will also sponsor a master class with Robert Guthrie following the symposium, on April 10.

Watch for more detailed announcements in the next issue of "Guitarist."

LARSON & HINKLEY from 4

you know—and I turned up the mike and said, 'I'm sorry we don't do any of those, but we are going to do this song just for you,' and we did 'The Water Is Wide.' Their chance of ever hearing that song . . . that song is Elizabethan. Yeah, we put a danceable thing on it. That was part of the change. It's such a good song you can't really ruin it. They listened and they loved the song, but you had to tell them you were playing it for them. They might never have listened if you hadn't said that. Later maybe we told them how old the song was. It is fun to do that.

"We made a couple of tapes of Robert Johnson," said Larson, "and gave them to a young fellow we knew that had never heard him, but knew about him, and he loved him. He said, 'I hear bands do those tunes today—rhythm and blues bands. If they only knew where those songs came from and heard the original songs and the power in them, they would really feel pretty lightweight."

"Robert Johnson," said Larson, "was just one blues guy . . . hellhound at my trail and all."

"They heard a new band on the street play it," Hinkley said. "They probably heard Butterfield play it. Elmer Hayes played it before. Howlin' Wolf. Muddy Waters. And then it goes back to Robert Johnson. That's fifth generation. It's changed. It's funny but some things will be strengthened and others will lose a lot. Something is gained and lost in every transmutation. We want to go as close as we can to the source and then make our own modifications rather than somebody else's, but not necessarily striving for the pure."

About their approach to arranging, Larson said, "We strive to get the idea across and understood in this day and age . . . Sometimes it just falls together." Hinkley used as an example: "This recording we heard works so well we shouldn't even bother to change the arrangement." Larson added, "One song we learned we put a deliberate mistake in because it sounds so neat. A real genuine

clinker," Hinkley explained, "For the space of a split second the tune goes into a major key and then goes out of it." Larson elaborated, "And it's sort of like the bead in some of the off-color Mexican beadwork. It's something irregular." Concluded Hinkley, "Folk music is very idiosyncratic."

"We try to keep time and kind of square all our corners," Larson went on, "because it's hard for people to follow a dog-legged tune that has odd timing. Oftentimes we'll take an idiosyncratic tune and square it off. 'My Money Never Runs Out' had some odd measures in it."

Hinkley continued, "[There were] two recordings we learned it from. [On] one of them, Les Cannon was playing with Cannon's Jugstompers (a jug band) on a long recording of it. On another recording he was playing with guitarist Blind Blake, who had no idea what Cannon was going to do. Even the band didn't know. We figured out his intentions, sort of, and arranged the tune around the melody and the idea of what he was doing on his banjo. It's kind of rough listening if you hear the original tune, but the lyrics are so great. The guy's a spendthrift and he throws his money away, and his money never runs out."

I asked about their hopes and dreams. "That we'll never grow up, get very sick, or get run over by buses or anything," said Hinkley, smiling.

"Well, I wish I was a better musician, really," said Larson. "I'm a little on the lazy side. I wish I was a better guitar player, but," said Larson, laughing low, "you don't get it by wishing."

"I wish I had about a bushel of gumption," Hinkley chimed in.

"Practice. That's what we need to do is practice harder," encouraged Larson.

Hinkley added, "What we'd go for is to get nice, steady employment. Enough that would get us in shape to play really well all the time by playing in front of people . . . You maintain this edge, like competitive teams that can practice real well, but after playing for a few audiences you're able to work well. Same thing applies to recording. You have to do that a lot to be good at it. What I'd like is lots of opportunities that keep us in food, clothing, and shelter, and keep us in front of our audiences a lot, keep us playing, keep us active, keep us interested and interesting. That's what I'd really want to have."

Judy Larson and Bill Hinkley regularly play on Thursday evenings at Scanlon's Restaurant in St. Paul.

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Pat Boone, step aside . . .

BY CHARLIE LAWSON

PAT DONOHUE is a nice guy. He's a family man, works in his dad's business and is on the road three to four months a year. In a world where niceness is equated with dullness, if not naivete, Pat's niceness has become an asset. By combining that niceness with the good-old-American work ethic, Donohue has calmly worked hard, step by step, to become the musician he is today.

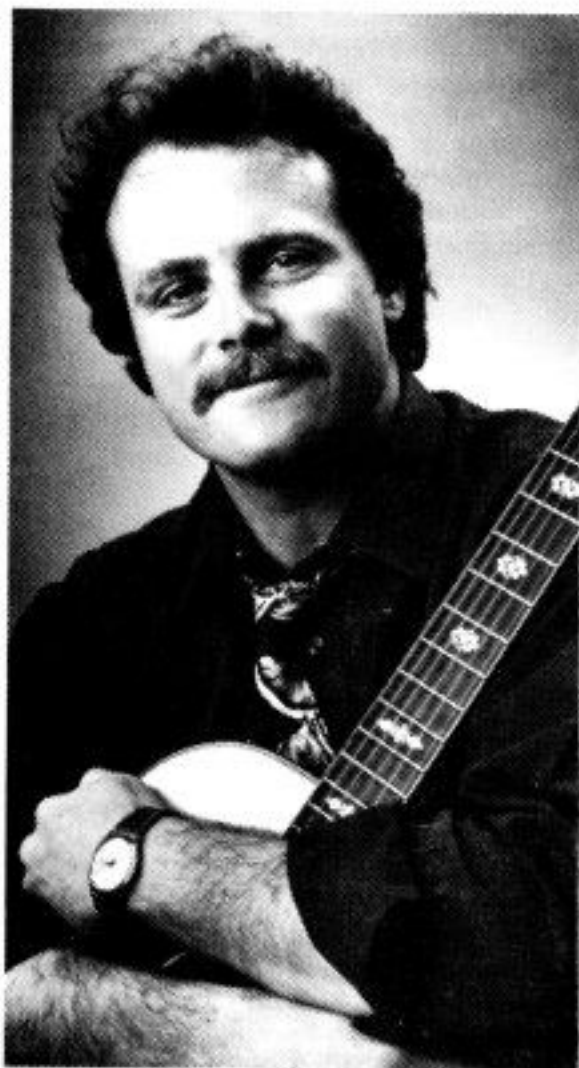
While researching this article's subject I called two of the people who are part of his story: Bob Feldman, head of Red House Records, who has released Pat's last two records (*Manhattan to Memphis*, 1986 and *Pat Donohue*, 1987) and Dean Magraw, the Twin Cities' omnipresent and versatile guitarist's Everyman. Feldman says, "You couldn't dream of working with someone better than Pat. He's ambitious, a thorough pro, and he's kind." He points out that Pat's niceness, humble nature and never-say-die attitude have endeared him to club owners. They ask him back. They know they can depend on him. Feldman, who helped Donohue find an agent (the agent now also loves Pat), said that Pat will go across the country to play a gig for peanuts and bust his butt doing so if he feels the gig is important. This attitude extends to his playing. Feldman calls Donohue's guitar work "tasty and skillful . . . he's a perfectionist."

Dean Magraw, a boyhood friend of Pat's, also praises his drive and craftsmanship. While in high school they formed a band called Jimmy-Joe Lewis and the All Night Eagle Blues Band, with Pat playing drums. He says the two of them idolized the classic country bluesmen and devoured the records and rare concerts of their heroes with voracious appetites. The young student would approach some of these heroes to ask them questions.

Leon Redbone once asked them back to his hotel, jammed with them and showed them things. Donohue's music draws on many influences. Magraw points to Pat's musicality, highlighting the development of his simultaneous arranging and improvising. He says, "Pat has paid his dues listening to many different guitarists and guitar records. At the time, Robert Johnson was the John Coltrane of our lives." To this, later on Pat would reply, "Robert Johnson was the Coltrane of Dean's life—for me it was Blind Blake."

Charlie Lawson: I have heard about you winning the national finger-picking championship. You have done quite a bit since then, but tell me about it anyway.

Pat Donohue: It was in Winfield, Kansas,



and they hold it every year. It essentially is called the Walnut Canyon Bluegrass Festival but everybody refers to it as the Winfield Bluegrass Festival. In addition to having three days of concerts they also have competitions there in flat picking, finger picking and banjo, and then there are some regional competitions in mandolin, dobro and dulcimer and other folk instruments. You enter and draw for the order you perform in and the judges are sequestered in a trailer and can't see you

but can only hear you. You're not allowed to sing or talk.

CL: Who were the judges?

PD: Chris Procter and Doc Watson . . . others.

CL: Were you up against heavyweight talent?

PD: There were a lot of good players there. There were not any famous people. I'm sure if Chet Atkins had been entered and Guy Van Duesen or Ry Cooder, it would have been a different outcome (laughs).

CL: Did you hear a lot of scary young players, old players?

PD: There were a couple of older guys who entered who did pretty well but by and large were derivative and not highly developed. There were some young kids there, whose names I can't remember, who were good players. I was happy to have won.

CL: Did you think you could win?

PD: Well, I thought I had a chance because it's a long ride, I wouldn't have driven down there if I thought I didn't have a chance, plus, I had been there the year before and won second place. I thought I had a few things going for me . . . I had all my own arrangements. A lot of people had worked up Merle Travis songs, so they could play them really well but I think the judges took that into consideration. I know I did when I was a judge in subsequent years. Originality really meant a lot to me.

The judging sometimes would get so subjective
DONOHUE to 9

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DONOHUE from 8

tive. There's a lot of discrepancies between who the judges like. You're really not supposed to discuss the players among yourselves but I know that afterwards I talked with one of them and we had almost the exact same ideas of who should have won but the third person had such a different view from ours. I know one year a guy should have won who didn't even make it into the finals.

CL: What are you judged on?

PD: Speed, agility, cleanness. Originality is a big chunk of it, execution is a big chunk, are you in tune, any mistakes. I thought I made a lot of mistakes but apparently they were covered up enough where the judges didn't catch them. That's another thing to talk about: What you are thinking when playing and what other people are perceiving are often really different.

CL: For you, is virtuosity an end?

PD: Well no, except when I'm recording. I'd hate to have to listen to a glitch for the rest of my life. But no, I try to go for the feel and the energy.

CL: Who are your influences?

PD: I'd cite Blind Blake as a big one, Robert Johnson, Lonny Johnson, it really goes chronologically from there. There's an awful lot of good players but I think my style lies somewhere between Blind Blake and Wes Montgomery. That's really what I'm trying to do is fuse a folk guitarist's technique with the harmonic sophistication of a jazz player.

CL: How did you learn to play the guitar?

PD: I approached the instrument chronologically. It's just kind of the way it worked out because the first things I got interested in were the really early blues and rag and I was doing that for a while and I started listening to 20s Jazz and then 30s swing music, that led me to listening to more of the 40s stuff and bebop and Charlie Parker and (laughs) that led me to Miles Davis and the 50s type jazz. The 20s to the 50s, a combination of those different styles of players.

CL: How did you get signed with Red House?

PD: Around 1984 I was in Denver playing bar and concert guitar, a lot of it. When I came to Minneapolis I just stepped back for a while and took a look at things and I decided I should record to get my direction together. I recorded the first LP just on my own, thinking I'll just have these songs and I thought of putting it out on my own and people kept telling me about Bob Feldman and Red House Records and that he might be interested. I took a tape to him, and he was. That led to the second LP, which we did together at Studio M (Minnesota Public Radio.)

CL: Is it hard to initially tour with no product?

PD: Well, yeah, it is. You call a radio station and you say you've got this new record out and you are probably the fifth or sixth person that day with a new record out, so you pretty much have to swallow your pride and know: If you want to do it, do it and see how it comes out. Today and yesterday, for instance, I've been just doing it constantly because I'm getting ready to go out on tour. I've been calling all these radio stations that program acoustic music, and before, they didn't know who I was, but now I call and say, 'Hi, this is Pat Donohue; and they go, 'Oh, the guitar player?' and it just makes things so much easier . . . People who program A.M. (acoustic music) are not out to get anybody. They

really don't stand to gain that much by doing what they're doing. They're doing it because they like to, and that makes a big difference. They have a very loyal following.

Sometimes it works in my favor and sometimes it doesn't, because I'm not a pure folkie by any stretch of the imagination, but what I do lends itself to a small listening-room situation, so I can get over in those places and when it comes to playing bars I'm not really high-energy enough.

CL: Who are the guitarists in town you admire?

PD: I'd have to say Tim Sparks, Dean, Mark

DONOHUE to 10



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Andrew York composed, or rather, improvised "Andecy" while traveling in France; the work is named after a small village in the champagne district. Mr. York's recording of "Andecy" was released in May, 1988 on the Windham Hill Records Guitar Sampler, which contains eleven pieces by eleven different artists.

Unfortunately, the notational format of "Andecy" may be confusing to many people; the upper staff is in the usual octave and clef for guitar, but the lower staff is in bass clef and in a different octave than the upper staff. If that explanation doesn't help, then just follow the fingerings carefully and be thankful that the lower staff is used sparingly.

Andecy

by Andrew York

(A bass note in parentheses is ghosted, or played quieter than the surrounding notes)
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For Guitar

DONOHUE from 9

Waggoner is a terrific be-bop player. There's this guy who comes to town every once in a while named Jeff Linski who is just a tremendous finger-style player. He's from just about anyplace. I don't think he has a home. I never go out because I've got a family and everything and if I go out somewhere I'm usually playing there.

CL: Describe your style.

PD: Blind Blake has a real interesting right-hand technique which no other blues or rag player has duplicated. He does the alternating thumb like all those early players except he puts in some unique syncopations. That's become a life's project of mine—to figure out exactly what he's doing. He'll hit two bass notes and then alternate with the thumb and so instead of bump-d, bump-d, it'll be baDump-de bu-Dumpata. Some of the other players got close to it, like Blind Boy Fuller and Reverend Gary Davis, but it wasn't the same as Blake. What I think I'd really like to do is apply his technique to more modern music.

CL: Is that what sets you apart from other like players?

PD: A lot of the finger-style players, like Ted Green or Lenny Grow or Tuck Anders, or even Tim Sparks, have listened to a lot of piano music and are able to voice things in a way that's a very elegant styling. I'm not really trying to do that so much as take a more simplistic approach to technique and still get the full harmonic effect.

CL: What does the future look like?

PD: Well, aside from the Spielberg film and the Stones tour . . . (laughs) pretty much going along as it has. I'm going to make another record, a folk/jazz record, and make people like me enough to come see me.

Charles Lawson is a member of the board of directors of the Minnesota Guitar Society and a freelance writer.

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ROCK NOTES from 6

certainly don't wanna leave it all up to Paul Metsa." I lit another cigarette.

"Well," she said, "that's only nine. Who's Number Ten on your list of favorite guitar players?"

"Are you kidding?!" I exclaimed. "—You're joking . . ."

"You mentioned Lloyd, Mould, Verlaine, Bingham, Lou Reed, Steve Vai, the three Micks . . . That's nine. Who's Number Ten?"

"Why, myself," I said, and hung up.

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