

# Guitarist

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VOL. 7 NO. 7

## CLASSICAL GUITARATHON

SATURDAY · FEBRUARY 1 · 7:30 PM

SEE PAGE 2.





Message from the prez ...

FORUMS 92

First of all, how 'bout a big hand for CHARLIE LAWSON, the man responsible for all the organizational work that went into the 1991 forums. Charlie is now going to take a well-deserved break from his forum responsibilities and Alan and I will split the duties for the forums in 1992.

1ST FORUM 92

The first forum of the new year will be a colloquium on the art of teaching the classical guitar. The four guest speakers will also participate in an informal panel discussion on the topic. Audience participation is encouraged. Instructors scheduled to speak are JEFFREY VAN, Univ. of MN, JOE HAGEDORN, Univ. of WI-River Falls, CHRIS KACHIAN, Univ. of St. Thomas and ALAN JOHNSTON, MacPhail Center for the Arts and St. Cloud State University.

It is hoped that this forum will be of great interest to many of you and like all M.G.S. Forums, it's free. The Art of Teaching the Classical Guitar will be held at 2 p.m., January 19, 1992, MacPhail Center for the Arts, 1128 LaSalle Avenue, Minneapolis.

2ND FORUM 92

In February, I will host three great jazz players: KEVIN DALEY, JOAN GRIFFITH and JIM OUSKA. Each player will perform and explain their unique style. Kevin is a Berklee grad whose playing is decidedly modern. Joan plays a classical guitar drawing on a Latin repertoire, and Jim is a blues-based player who plays a hollow body electric guitar. This forum will take place at 3 p.m., Sunday, February 23 at O'Gara's in St. Paul (Selby and Snelling). The forums are always free.

Again, we all want to thank Charlie Lawson for the great job on 1991 forums. I hope Alan and I can do as good a job. See you at the forums.—SH

GUITARATHON SUCCEEDS ... AGAIN

The JAZZ GUITARATHON III was a smash hit, an artistic success and a great night of guitar playing for players and audience alike. LEIGH KAMMON introduced nine great local players, who

Classical Guitarathon

On February 1st, the Minnesota Guitar Society will present the always popular, almost annual, Classical Guitarathon. This event will be a wonderful opportunity for classical guitar lovers to hear many of the Twin Cities' best players.

This year's line-up will feature many new people as well as some Classical Guitarathon veterans:

Anthony Titus, Chris Kachian, Alan Johnston, David Crittenden, Joe Hagedorn, Gene Swanson, Maria Olaya, Scott Davies, Paul Berget, Dan Estrem, Glen Larson

As with previous Classical Guitarathons, this year's will feature a variety of solo and ensemble performances, as well as a good variety of styles from Renaissance to Classical to Flamenco.

The concert will take place at the Weyerhauser Auditorium in Saint Paul's Landmark Center at 75 West 5th Street on Saturday, February 1, 7:30 p.m. The Landmark Center is near the Ordway, next to Rice Park. The admission charge will be \$6 for guitar society members and \$8 for non-members. Tickets will be sold at the door. For more information call 874-7406.

showed off the incredible variety that is "jazz guitar." The evening began at 7:30 with CRAIG ANDERSON and SCOTT FRASER playing straight-ahead jazz standards. It was great to see these two wonderful players perform together. KEVIN DALEY, who played next, chose more modern material: Herbie Hancock's "Dolphin Dance" and a composition from Pat Metheny's first album. RON BROWN blasted off into the stratosphere with original tunes using guitar synthesizer, and JOAN GRIFFITH brought us back to earth with a set featuring Jobim's "One Note Samba," performed with her group, Naima. Next, KEVIN CARLSON played a set including tunes by Jerry Reed, followed by DAVE ROOS playing original tunes. TOM CRAVENS dedicated his set to Barney Kessel, and JIM OUSKA brought the event to a conclusion, leading a group performance of Charlie Parker's "Scraple from the Apple." Wow! What a night.

Special thanks to: LEIGH KAMMON for his wonderful job as MC; RON BROWN, for publicity; JEFF NELSON for the great group photo; PETE HERMAN, O'Gara's and JACK SALSINI,

for handling the gate. See you all next year at Jazz Guitarathon IV.

BREAKSTONE AT LUXFORD

JOSHUA BREAKSTONE will perform at the Luxford Hotel, January 7-11 in a trio with drummer Kenny Horst and bassist Billy Peterson. Breakstone is a phenomenal artist who can be heard on his recordings for Contemporary. His titles Self-Portrait in Swing and 9x3 reveal brilliant technique and tasteful lines that echo the music of Charlie Parker and Lennie Tristano.

Breakstone is also a skilled teacher and has conducted workshops at the University of South Florida, the University of Alberta and at Bud Shank's Centrum Workshop. Additionally, he was a faculty member at the Rhode Island Conservatory. While in the Twin Cities Breakstone will be available for a workshop and private lessons. For more information on the workshop call 333-0169 or call Breakstone personally at the Hotel Luxford.

## INSIDE MINNESOTA GUITARISTS

**J**im Ouska, winner of this year's West Bank School of Music Jazz Composer Series grant, is an excellent guitarist, dedicated performer, and accomplished composer. A professional musician for twenty years, Ouska currently works with the jazz band Jordu and a blues band called The Blenders. He's worked with Eddie Berger, Prudence Johnson, Bernie Edstrom, the Minnesota Vikings Band, and many others. Ouska also performs solo, which allows him to present to audiences the different styles that form his musical self.

Ouska studied music at the University of Minnesota and West Bank School of Music and has studied jazz with Dean Granros and Kevin Daley. However, he is mainly self-taught, and traces his earliest important influences to Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton. Like many, he started out playing rock and roll. His interest in Hendrix and Clapton led him to study the blues through B.B. King, Freddie King, Albert King, Robert Johnson and other early artists. At the same time, he found himself playing in an eleven-piece band, which finally became too unwieldy for its creative members. Ouska and the others

## JAZZ &amp; BLUES GUITAR:

**Jim Ouska**

BY CATHY NIXON



broke up to explore the other extreme of the solo acoustic experience.

For Ouska this meant folk music and singing. The sounds of his earthy blues became soft and lilting interpretations of contemporary and traditional folk tunes. Folk music eventually evolved into bluegrass, and Ouska went on to play the coffee house circuit from Stevens Point to UW-Madison.

Looking back, Ouska can see that his adventures in the realm of the acoustic were a natural consequence of his need to know the roots of blues and jazz. Having played so much electronic music, he was curious to know how the early players worked without sound systems. Performing in bars that were probably not designed for acoustics, their music had to be strong, not too subtle and very good to keep the audience's attention.

After exhausting the folk and bluegrass scene, Ouska knew that he wanted to play jazz. Once that decision was made, he began the slow and difficult process of learning the art. He took some lessons, but learned mostly by listening. This pro-

**OUSKA** to 9

## CLASSIC AMERICAN GUITAR:

**Dakota Dave Hull**

BY EDWARD J. MUNAFO



decades. Dakota Dave Hull has created a revolution of his own: looking back at tradition while looking ahead to the future.

When Hull first picked up a flat pick back in his high school days, the music of Tom Paxton, Phil Ochs, Dylan, Dave Van Ronk, and Doc Watson was the rage. It wasn't until he explored the more traditional forms of folk music that he established a foundation for his style. Texas swing was such a profound influence and musical direction it later led to a long-time collaboration with Sean Blackburn. Western swing also opened other avenues to traditional jazz, especially swing. At the same time the tug of folk music would not let go, and in his playing one can hear the jazz tradition juxtaposed against Celtic music, Old Time, and blues traditions. However, for Hull these were not conscious moves to replicate Watson's or Van Ronk's styles, but to play music that he felt, music he liked to play, and music that reflected his artistic direction.

The influences upon Hull were many, and Doc Watson was a profound one. In

**HULL** to 4

**I** first heard of Dakota Dave Hull in my best friend and long-time collaborator George Healy's basement in Newton, Massachusetts. I, like many other budding guitarists, had heard Doc Watson's music. I remember hearing the opening tune on *Hull's Victory*, "Steel Guitar Rag," and was astounded by the feel and drive of his playing. The melody was punctuated by a bounce and jazziness that seemed to capture the essence of Doc Watson's playing, while having a feel of a western swing band. Although Hull has moved on to a wider variety of music, he has never let the pursuit of speed and technique dominate his music.

When Doc Watson first stepped on stage at the Newport Folk Festival 28 years ago, he began a revolution that would forever change the way acoustic guitar was perceived in the folk music community. Unlike its cousin in the rock and roll world, the acoustic guitar was at the threshold of a rebirth and renaissance of its own, a role it had been denied except in concert and recital halls. Since that day, Doc Watson's music has inspired instrumentalists and singers for nearly three





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## HULL from 3

Hull's playing one can also hear the dynamic guitar of Ted Bogen, of Bogen, Martin and Armstrong, who influenced his rhythm playing. Others were Leo Raley, and Bob Dunn of Milton Brown and His Musical Brownies, who weren't guitarists but showed him other ways to approach playing and listening. "Listen to everything you can," Hull says. "Listen to other guitar players, sure, but the guitar is only one musical instrument out of ... hundreds. There are other things going on, and if you can capture a feeling that is going on someplace else, or it touches you, reaches you and you can somehow translate that to what you're doing, that's great."

If you listen to Hull's music you will notice a great deal of respect for the blues in his playing. For him the blues is an integral aspect of his sound, and he credits the work of Charlie Christian and Eddie Lang as major contributors. Many up and coming artists and writers tend to listen to contemporary performers like Dylan and Greg Brown but never delve into the tradition or roots to find out where the music emerged from. Consequently, Hull feels that many of the newer artists are doing less than exciting music. "If you're going to operate in a style of music, if you're going to write protest songs, for example, you ought to have a little bit of an idea of the history of that writing movement."

As I sat there in Hull's Minneapolis home surrounded by guitars, records, and books, I could not help but feel that he is someone well-versed in the things he cares deeply about. The number of different guitars hanging on the wall illustrated the differing facets of this artist. Steel-stringed dreadnoughts, arch tops, steel guitars, a classical and occasional electric guitar reflected the diversity and color he brings to an evolving and changing style.

Dakota Dave Hull brings this spectrum of colors to his recent release, *Reunion Rag*, on Flying Fish records. The palette of musical color is evident by the variety of guitars, giving him a wider choice of color and texture in the making of this CD. The CD is made up of solos and duets and features mostly flatpicking, with the addition of some fingerpicking, all in a jazz-like, swing style. There is an absence of true country songs here, but there is undoubtedly a country feel to his music. The opening selection is a Leon McAuliffe classic, "Panhandle Rag," tying it to

*Hull's Victory*, but the disc quickly departs from there.

The title piece, "Reunion Rag," is an original inspired by Dave Van Ronk. "When You're Smiling" is a piece reminiscent of earlier swing bands of the thirties inspired by the mandolin playing of Leo Raley. "June Apple" features something akin to traditional flatpicking guitar style executed on the arch top guitar. The choice of instrumentation in this piece may seem a little odd to the staunch traditionalist, but the mix of color and style brings out of the subtle nuances of the crosspicking sections and the percussive drive of the melody in a new way. "Teague's Deal," written in honor of Curtis Teague, is one of ten original compositions (another one is a collaboration with Cam Waters), proving Hull's competency as writer and instrumentalist. I recommend this CD not only for the fine musicianship but also for the well-crafted original compositions—we can only wait in anticipation of where his writing will take him.

No sooner is one project completed than another begins. Hull is already in the initial stages of writing, direction and content of his next Flying Fish release. Meanwhile he is concentrating on the promotion of *Reunion Rag*.

One of the highlights in his career was having Doc Watson play on his album *Hull's Victory*. "You can't say enough good things about an opportunity like that, but the thing that sets Doc apart from most of these other guitar players is that he will slow it down, he will sing a song, he will fingerpick, and he will flatpick slowly; yet at the same time he can tear it up, and that makes for a real entertaining listening experience," Hull says. As we talked about Doc and Merle, Hull's words were filled with a great deal of respect and admiration for them, and it shows in his playing. However, since those days, he has progressed as an artist to take his own place in the world of classic American guitar music. Though he plays with the drive and stamina of Doc, Hull retains his own sound and style, becoming an innovator rather than an imitator. He changes tempo, material, color and style with ease and grace, never compromising the music's integrity.

Producing art is only one of many problems a musician faces in today's media supermarket. Another one is the amount of work to put a tour together. For many

**HULL to 7**

# Winning the National Flatpicking Guitar Championship

By Steven Earl Howard

Arriving at 8:30 on a Saturday morning, the contestants for the Walnut Valley Association's 20th Annual Flatpicking Guitar Championships were greeted by a temperature in the upper 40's and rain, just the conditions they dreaded. Nevertheless, they gamely drew numbers for order of appearance in the contest at Winfield, Kansas, held this year on September 21. According to Louise Logsdon, administrator of the flatpicking contests for fifteen years, these guitar players were serious musicians, many entering year after year with the objective of winning the coveted title. To be successful, some players would certainly benefit from a talent for playing fast in cold weather, but also from the craft and knowledge of what it takes to win at Winfield.

In 1991, the 32 players from 17 states were prepared to play "four different tunes in the traditional fiddle tune or bluegrass style" with a flatpick only, as the contest rules state. These requirements were in keeping with the flavor of the Walnut Valley Festival, a superb, four-day celebration including some of the top entertainers in bluegrass, folk, old-time, Irish, and Celtic music. Since the flatpick guitar contest was first held in 1971, seven other contests have been added over the years, including autoharp, finger-picking guitar, mountain dulcimer, mandolin, old-time fiddle, hammered dulcimer, and bluegrass banjo.

If the experience of 1991's top three flatpick guitar finishers is any indication, the secret formula for success, besides overcoming the damp and chill, is really quite simple. Pick traditional tunes only and leave out the newgrass, jazz or pop tunes. Pick 'em clean, pick 'em fast and don't completely pre-arrange your tunes, unless you have nerves of steel.

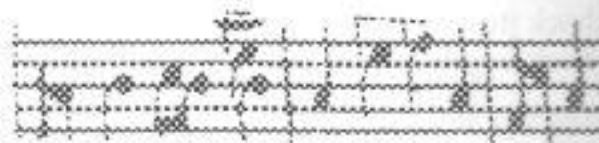
What it means to "win" at Winfield actually consists of ending up in either first, second, or third place. In doing so, the guitarist not only earns substantial prestige as a player, but is also guaranteed a "cherry" guitar as a prize. The 1991 first place prize was a Mark Leaf instrument case plus a choice of three custom-crafted dreadnought guitars: a Dan Crary Signature Model from Taylor, Listung, Inc.; an HD-28 customized Twentieth Anniversary Walnut Valley Festival guitar from C.F. Martin & Co.; and a custom Winfield Deadnought Twentieth from Pimental & Sons. Second place wins a trophy plus choice of the two remaining guitars.

Larry Lintner, owner of the Pimental Twentieth as third place winner, claims no special knowledge of what is required to make the top three. "Play 'em clean and fancy 'em up a little, as much as you can," he says. "But as far as what it takes to win, I wouldn't know. A lot of people get up there and play all these fancy songs and put in all these hot licks and they don't seem to win. I try to play the basic tunes and just try to play them clean and fast."

Lintner resides in Edgerton, Kansas, about a three-hour drive from Winfield. He entered the flatpick guitar contest in 1975 and 1977 and has entered the mandolin contest as well, three times. Lintner has also entered the Kansas State Fiddling and Picking Championships at Lawrence, Kansas, winning first place on mandolin in 1987, 88 and 89. Also, he won second place in guitar in 1990 and first place in 1991, which inspired him to try his luck again with guitar at Winfield.

Lintner's style is somewhat reminiscent of Norman Blake. "He's always been my favorite guitar player," he says. "I tried to steal every lick he ever played. He's not as technical, no fancy notes like Crary and all them. He's got soul, or somethin'."

The 1991 guitar contest was Lintner's first competition at Winfield. "Well, I just kinda entered for somethin' to do," he says. "I didn't dream about winning. I wasn't even going to enter but another feller, he talked me into it. For the first round, I was back there—I was so nervous I didn't listen to anybody." Lintner played very straight-ahead versions of "Texas Gales" and "Beaumont Rag" on his 1975 Martin D-35. "Then me and the other guy went back to the trailer and put away our guitars. And I set there and got to thinkin', 'I wonder who got into the top five?'—if it was anybody I knew." Lintner returned to the grandstand in time to hear his number—twenty-four—called as one of the top five players to play in



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## FLATPICK from 5

the second round. Stunned, he chased back to the campground to locate his back-up player.

During the 2nd round, Lintner played "Turkey in the Straw" first, at about 132 beats per minute. Then, for a fast tune, he played "Under the Double Eagle" at 144 in a speed fairly typical of the 1991 competitors. Robert Shafer, who took second place, and Roy Curry, who took first, played their fast tunes at 144 and 168(!) respectively. Speed, when combined with clarity, seemed to play a major role in the contest.

"Myself and my back-up player did the contest around here (Edgerton) but I don't think we see each other but twice a year and we don't have that many tunes worked out," Lintner says. "So, I was kind of limited on what I could play. The second round, all I was concerned about was not looking too stupid. Trying not to make too many mistakes. I warn't even after the trophy."

Another of the top five players was Nashville virtuoso Randy Howard, whom Robert Shafer describes as being "an incredible musician, an awesome talent." In 1990, Howard won first place in both the mandolin and fiddle contests at Winfield. In the 1991 rules it states: "Contests are open to anyone except those who are performing as a billed or paid entertainer ... and those who have been the first place winner within the past three years—specifically the years 1988 through 1990." Hence, Howard's presence in the guitar contest.

Randy Howard's tunes were filled with spectacular arpeggios, pull-offs and hammer-ons. What may have worked against Howard, in spite of his virtuosity, was the proliferation of "progressive" ideas in his playing. Also, Lintner may have missed fewer notes, and although he didn't match Howard's pyrotechnics, the judges may have decided in his favor for that reason.

After the 2nd round was finished, at around 1 p.m., the announcer declared numbers 12, 18 and 24 as the top three winners. Larry Lintner just happened to be facing the grandstand at that moment. An expression of surprise and delight registered on his face similar to that of a person who had just won Lotto America. "It was quite an honor to win. People come from all over the world just to enter," says Lintner.

The exact order of the top three finishers would not be announced until the award ceremony at 5:30 p.m., when Robert Shafer of Walton, West Virginia discovered he had taken second place. "I had no gripes about what I had done," Shafer says. "I was not satisfied with what I had played. I could have played better. It's a great honor and I was fortunate to get second place this year." Shafer played the contest in 1991 with the Gallagher he chose as first place winner in 1983. He also placed third in the mandolin contest in 1984.

Shafer has some strategies that have enabled him to win flat-pick contests over the years. "I felt that I was having an off day," he says. "Obviously, Roy was having a good day. What I heard him play

was real good and real clean, which is a big factor in winning a contest. You *have* to be clean."

Shafer is a professional musician with ample contest experience. He has won many guitar contests, including state championships for Tennessee, Alabama and Ohio (twice). He also has judging experience. However, he did not know who judged the 1991 Winfield. "To be honest, I don't know where the judges were at. I assume they were isolated off somewhere in another building," he said.

In the first round, Shafer played "Cotton Patch Rag" and "Old Joe Clark;" in the second "Bill Cheatam" and a tune written by a friend, entitled "Grassy." "I try to play something the judges can relate to, something straight-ahead," he explains. "I've heard guys play some really complex stuff and pull it off. And, I've heard guys play fancy stuff and have a very bad case of nerves. Some of my stuff is arranged, but really is pretty much improvised. Yeah, I have an idea of where I want to go, but I don't know just exactly how I'm gonna get there. I try to play something that if I get into a tight position—and I start to feel cramped, I can work my way out of it."

Of all the contests he's played, Shafer feels Winfield is the biggest. "Without a doubt it's the most prestigious," he says. "Mainly because it's a national contest. That is the distinction. It has been around twenty years. I mean, if you're a good musician you're going to get work regardless. And winning the guitar is wonderful. I've gotten two great instruments out of

**FLATPICK to 8**

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**HULL from 4**

artists that means endless hours on the phone with agents and club owners, horrendous expenses in promoting an album on the road, and having less time to practice one's art. However, Hull hopes to be out there touring soon. He has some dates in Texas planned for the spring, where he'll feature some of the personnel from this latest CD and some surprise guests: "... it's basically a matter of who's available, who wants to go, how the money is, that sort of thing, but there are three or four people I can draw from," he says. And if things go well on this tour he plans to set up some dates on both the east and west coasts. Hull urges any reputable agents to feel free to call him.

At the end of our interview I felt I had to ask the question: what kind of advice would he give an up-and-coming guitarist? In a humorous tone he replied: "Give it up, become a CPA. No, I think ... just listen to music with as open a mind as you possibly can, listen to as much music as you possibly can. There's never ever been a better time for access to good music, to old music. There's music that was recorded fifty, sixty, seventy years ago that you can hear clear as a bell with CD's, they can clean some of that stuff up. I picked some Leadbelly discs up and it was like hearing them for the first time

—what a delight. It's all well and good to listen to whoever's on the radio today, but they got that stuff somewhere, and if you dig into that a bit and find out a little about our past American musical history ... I think that's real important—just keep all those avenues open."

We concluded our interview with some swapping of stories, some tips on how to brew my own coffee at home and other bits and pieces that can't fit into this piece. But that afternoon I came away with a good sense of what this artist is about and an understanding and reaffirmation of the importance tradition plays in his music: classic American guitar. ■

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**We regret that due to space considerations we were not able to run the third part of our interview with Eduardo Fernandez. Please stay tuned ... we will have it included in our March/April issue.**

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## FLATPICK from 6

it. But the prestige is important, and so is adding the title to your resume as a professional musician. Mainly, my thing is playing the electric guitar. That's what I do for a living."

In the twenty years of the contest many musicians have bolstered their resumes by capturing a Winfield title. In 1975, Mark O'Connor managed the unlikely feat of winning first place in both fiddle and guitar the same year. He was fourteen years old at the time. It was the same year Peter Ostroushko won third in the guitar. According to Louise Lodgson, Ostroushko is the only Minnesotan ever to place in the Winfield flatpick guitar contest. Minnesotans Pat Donohue ('83) and Phil Heywood ('86) both placed first in the fingerpicking guitar contest.

Roy Curry, of Chattanooga, Tennessee, is the twentieth anniversary flatpick guitar champion. Curry was a professional musician playing electric guitar for various country groups from 1981 to 1987. He performed with Warner Brothers' artists The Forester Sisters most of the '80s, but now has a day job "like a normal person." Lately, he also gigs weekly, playing banjo in a bluegrass band.

Curry entered Winfield in 1979, failed to place but returned to take first place in 1980. Of his 1979 playing, Roy says, "I played 'Blackberry Blossom' and 'Dixie Hoedown' that year and sounded just like a dozen other guys, you know: 'show me something else.' I was going to do a real slow tune (this year), 'Wayfaring Stranger,' but then, I got to thinking, 'shoot, they're not hearing the rhythm guitar,' and it would leave a lot of holes and pauses. It might be kind of weird to the guy (judge) inside."

It is interesting to note that a handful of contestants played tunes well outside the realm of old-time and bluegrass music. One fellow played an exquisite version of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," which impressed the audience mightily but most surely eliminated him from the contest.

Several tasteful waltzes and slow tunes were played the first round. Of those players, none made it into the second round. Other players hindered their chances by playing "Black Mountain Rag" and "Alabama Jubilee." The objective of competing should have been to distinguish one's playing from all the other guitar players—and playing those

particular tunes achieved exactly the opposite effect, since they were heard incessantly all morning.

In 1991, Curry chose "Bill Cheatum" and "Remington Ride" in the first round and "Soldier's Joy" and "Big Mon" in the second, played on a 1987 Martin DH-28. The "Soldier's Joy" introduction consisted of a dynamic series of cross-picking and bluesy runs ending up an A7 chord, creating a tension that led into a fairly straightforward but heavily syncopated version of the tune, done in dropped-D tuning. Curry was inspired to do "Big Mon" from Tony Rice's version on the first Rounder album. In neither of the tunes did Curry appear to miss a note. Also distinctive was the sheer, unchallenged speed and clarity of "Big Mon" in the competition, which may very well have won it for him. Of the speed, Curry comments, "I hoped it would help."

Curry says the cold would have affected him a lot more were it not for his practice regimen using special tapes to build up his stamina. When he finally competed, his performance speed was actually slower than his practice speed. Additionally, he sat with his hands under his arms before taking his turn. During the second round, the cold was less of a problem, since it had quit raining and may have been as much as 20 degrees warmer.

Curry claims to have been distracted by the echo bouncing back from the grandstand, created by the contest sound system. This problem was not apparent from his performance. The monitor was set much weaker than the sound echoing from the audience. It was arranged purposefully, so that virtually no guitar from back-up players would be sent to the feed going to the judges. This scenario improved when a large audience accumulated in the grandstand during the afternoon and soaked up the ambient sound. "So, I'm sure they couldn't have the monitors as loud as we wanted them,"

Curry says. "I could hear me echoing off the bleachers almost as loud as I could hear my guitar."

Curry practiced his four instrumentals two or three hours a day throughout the summer. "When I first started practicing 'Big Mon' last summer I was playing it 130 [beats per minute] or so. I started doing the flatpick tunes during the night when we played on the riverboat on the Tennessee River. And I started playin' a little faster and a little faster. And eventually, I got it up to 165 on the boat. So I could play those three times and get through them. And I think it helps you to play in front of people. You can't stop and say, 'Oh well, I made a mistake.' You keep going and get through the song."

Later, after the awards ceremony, two of the judges came up and introduced themselves to Curry. One was Celtic guitar wizard Joel Mabus, the other was the guitarist for Union Station, Tim Staffrd. They complimented Curry on his playing. "To me, you have to walk a fine line between doing something complicated enough so the judges say, 'that was really neat,' but not makin' it so complicated that you're liable to fumble it. There was a few people playing out there that lost their song, lost their place or somethin'."

Overall, Curry has competed in at least 100 flatpick contests. "After I won Winfield in 1980, I won the next three contests I entered. For the next year I didn't lose any. Then I lost one. Then I started losing them like normal. Had a nice string going there for a while, mostly cash prizes, \$50 here or there. Pays for gas money and your motel. Come back home and your fingers are sore." ■

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**OUSKA from 3**

cess began some eight or nine years ago, and became so time-consuming that Ouska hardly played in public at all except to sustain himself. Compelling as his need to play jazz was, Ouska found the solitary process of studying jazz very frustrating.

Also a teacher at Minneapolis Community College and the West Bank School of Music, Ouska explains that playing jazz requires more theory, sophistication and subtlety than blues or folk. To demonstrate, he brought out his Epiphone Broadway and Stratocaster to show the different expressions of tension in jazz and blues. The blues tension on the lighter, much smaller Stratocaster is created by bending the strings, resulting in bluntly sensual tones. On the bulkier and larger Broadway, the jazz tension is created with altered scales or harmonic shifts, and the tones are of a more cerebral sensuality. The Stratocaster's thin neck and light strings permit the thumb to wrap over the low E string and makes bending easier. On the other hand, bending strings in jazz sounds trite and ineffective. The Broadway has a thicker, shorter neck, more similar to a classical guitar, and is played with a more classical left hand technique. Despite the differences in the styles, Ouska loves to play both and sometimes finds it hard to make the transition in mood and technique between the two.

Since November 1987, Ouska has been playing jazz with the band Jordu at O'Gara's in St. Paul every Sunday night. Jordu is a straight ahead jazz quartet, comprising Ouska on guitar, Jeff King on saxophone, Jim Chenoweth on bass and Pat Hume on drums. Aside from winning the 1991 WBSM Jazz Composer Series, Jordu has been featured in the Twin Cities Jazz Society Second Sunday Series, and was nominated in the best new jazz bands category for the 1998 Minnesota Music Awards. Jordu has contributed significantly to a hotbed of original jazz stirring up at O'Gara's and growing into the Cities.

The tunes "Simmertime," "As I Wait," "The Jeanne Walk," and others played at his Composers Series concert, exemplify Ouska's abilities as a polished and expressive composer. For Ouska, there is no particular way to write a song. Sometimes the tunes fall right into place. At other times, he grasps a snippet of a tune only to find that finishing it off becomes like pulling teeth. He works alone for the most part, although the band sometimes helps

out on with the arrangements.

Ouska wants to keep developing his original work, and would someday like to play a concert incorporating his jazz, blues, and folk styles. Although he wants to document his music on a CD, he also wants to continue to separate out what he is about musically, from peripheral music business distractions. Ouska's main goal

is to keep on playing.

You can catch Ouska and the Blenders at various venues, including the Cabooze, O'Gara's, and the 5 Corners Saloon. Keep watching for word of Jordu appearances at other venues around town. ■

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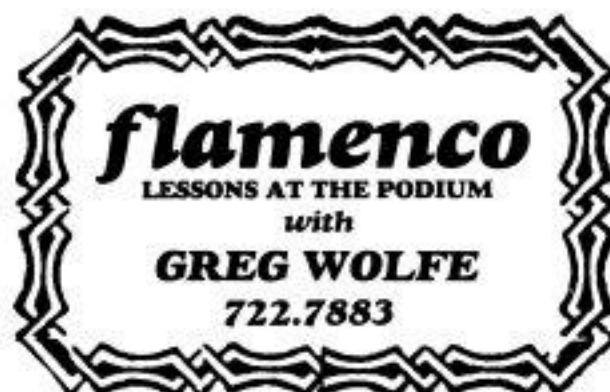
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