

# Guitarist

A Publication of the Minnesota Guitar Society • P.O. Box 14986 • Minneapolis, MN 55414

JULY / AUGUST 1999

VOL. 15 NO. 4

## PREVIEW OF 1999-2000 SUNDIN HALL SERIES

The details of the 1999-2000 Minnesota Guitar Society season are just being finalized.  
Mark your calendars now and fliers will be mailed out later this summer.

SATURDAY • OCTOBER 9

**Paulo Bellinatti & Monica Salmaso** / *guitar & voice*  
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SATURDAY • NOVEMBER 13

**Javier Calderon** / *classical guitar*

SATURDAY • DECEMBER 11

**Manhattan Duo**

**Kevin Gallagher & Antigoni Goni** / *classical guitars*

SATURDAY • JANUARY 22

**Acoustic Guitarathon**

SATURDAY • FEBRUARY 19

**Alex De Grassi** / *acoustic steel string guitar*

SATURDAY • MARCH 11

**Stephen Robinson** / *classical guitar*

SUNDAY • MARCH 12

**Stephen Robinson** / *masterclass*

SATURDAY • APRIL 15

**Benjamin Verdery** / *classical guitar*

SATURDAY • MAY 6

**Classical Guitarathon**

# Fingerstyle Jazz Guitar

By Paul Hintz

## The Legacy of George Van Eps

When George Van Eps died of pneumonia at the age of 87 in November of 1998, the life and career of one of the most unique guitarists of the 20th century came to an end. But the influence of his playing and the impact of his major innovation — the 7-string archtop guitar — continue to be felt, and in some important ways are really only beginning. In this article, I'd like to discuss some aspects of Van Eps' legacy, and the odd turns in his life and career that contributed to that legacy.

He was born in 1913 in New Jersey into a musical family. His parents and older siblings were all musicians; in fact, when Van Eps was a boy his father's pianist was George Gershwin. Van Eps took up the banjo at age 9, while bedridden with rheumatic fever. By 11, he was a member of the Musicians Union. His first recording, with his two brothers, was made in 1927. Not long after, he heard jazz guitarist Eddie Lang, and switched to the guitar. He

moved to Hollywood in the mid-1930s after his marriage and continued to find steady work in dance bands and on the radio. During WWII, he returned to New Jersey and worked in his father's factory. This was the first, and perhaps least odd, hiatus from the guitar.

After the war, he returned to California and worked steadily through the 1950s, appearing on thousands of record dates, radio shows, and soundtracks. He made one LP as leader. Then, around 1960, he made an odd-seeming decision: he and his wife began a hobby-supply business. He was out of music for several years, including 1962-1964, when he didn't play at all. In the 1960s, the supply business was sold and Van Eps returned to music. One more hiatus followed: a serious hand injury in the 1970s that again kept him from playing for several years. He gradually resumed playing and teaching in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, he made a series of recordings

paired with guitarist Howard Alden, a man young enough to be Van Eps' grandson.

None of the interruptions to his musical life, that is, their *meaning* to Van Eps, is really discussed in the sources I've found. What struck me, reading the brief biographies on which the preceding summary is based, is an unspoken sense of ambiguity about music. In more than one interview, Van Eps described himself as a "stubborn Dutchman" and I see this image of the bedridden boy, teaching himself the one instrument not already claimed by some other, older, more accomplished member of the household. The stubborn, solitary sideman on thousands of recordings who studied watch repair and built a miniature train at a scale he was told was "impossible" and wrote an exhaustive series of chord-method books with a technical vocabulary he largely invented.

There is a kind of insular ambigui-

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## Guitarist

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### EDITOR

JERRY BANNACH

### PRODUCTION MGR

GENE SWANSON

### CALENDAR

JOANNE BACKER

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PAT McCARTY

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### Minnesota Guitar Society

#### MISSION STATEMENT

1. To promote the guitar, in all its stylistic and cultural diversity, through our newsletter and through our sponsorship of public forums, concerts and workshops.
2. To commission new music and to aid in its promotion, publication and recording.
3. To serve as an educational and social link between amateur and professional guitarists and the community.
4. To promote and help create opportunities for Minnesota guitarists and players of related instruments.



## Gary Joyner

### REVIEWS

#### CDs

*Duo*, Charlie Hunter and Leon Parker, Blue Note Records, 7243-4-99187-2-6

Mention guitarist Charlie Hunter in a group of musicians and the discussion will soon turn to whether Hunter is essentially a good comping guitarist, lead player, or in fact a good bass player.

Wherever opinions fall, the conversation inevitably ends with everyone shaking their heads in amazement because Hunter does all of those things at the same time. I would add Hammond B-3 player to the list because when he sends the five top strings of his 8-string guitar through a revolving Leslie speaker a darned convincing comping organist joins the band. The three bottom strings of the guitar are actually bass strings

that are run through a separate pick-up into a bass amplifier. Hunter usually plays original compositions, through one CD was entirely devoted to Bob Marley's *Natty Dread* album.

Previous recordings have been done in trio and quartet situations with saxes, drummers, and vibes. This time it's a duo setting with drummer Leon Parker. The resulting music is more subdued than that of previous albums. The magic of Hunter's guitar style gets a chance to shine in the stripped down context. His fingerstyle approach is more apparent than on previous works because he has more room to stretch out. There are two cover tunes, including Brian Wilson's "Don't Talk," as well as one number by drummer Parker. The rest are Hunter compositions in the cool and contemporary vein one has come to expect from him.

This may well be the best Charlie Hunter album yet, especially for guitarists seeking a clearer picture of what he's up to on his instrument.

*Passion Session*, Don Ross, Narada 72438-47218-2-4

Don Ross gets a big, beefy, rhythmic sound from his 6-string, 7-string, and baritone guitars. Ross is the only person to win twice in the famed guitar competitions at Winfield, Kansas. He plays with a thumbpick and has clean, powerful technique. He describes his own work this way, "The compositions — rhythms, melodies, and inner voices — come all at once. Achieving them all at once is what makes my approach unique." His tunes are melodic and passionate.

The level of musicianship along with the excellent production quality will make this a valued and satisfying album for any fan of accomplished fingerstyle guitar composition and technical execution. The CD is part of a Narada "Masters of Acoustic Guitar" series produced by Artie Traum.

#### BOOKS

*Guitar Songs*, Jerry Silverman, Warner Bros. Publications, 15800 NW 48th Ave., Miami, FL 33014.

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**VAN EPS**, from page 2

ity in his playing as well. Ted Greene's description of the Van Eps style, in a *Guitar Player* magazine (August 1981) cover story on Van Eps, highlights the use of the delayed entrance of notes in a chord to create a conversational texture between bass, middle, and treble parts, an "attractive rhythmic concept" clearly derived from the Swing Era; (what in the trade is called "businessman[sic]'s bounce"), and the exploitation of the sonority of the added bass string, which opens up the chords no matter what key or position Van Eps is in. The "conversational texture" and expanded sonority create a complexity of sound usually found in compositions for piano.

The consistent use of these elements can be heard in every recording Van Eps made. Excellent examples are the version of "There Will Never Be Another You" on the out-of-print 1966 Capitol LP *My Guitar* and the original composition "Salute to Basie" on the 1993 Concord CD *Seven and Seven*.

These two tracks illustrate another oddity of Van Eps' career. Despite the fact that his performing career spanned over 70 years, despite the fact that he appeared on thousands of recordings, and despite his status for at least the last 25 years of his life as a "legendary" guitarist, Van Eps recorded only four LPs under his own name (in the 1950s and 1960s) and only five CDs during his association with the Concord jazz label in the early to mid 1990s. One of those CDs, the aptly titled *Legends* consists of a set of solo performances by guitarist Johnny Smith and a set by Van Eps. That CD is the only recording on which there is a sizable number of completely solo performances by Van Eps.

The small body of recorded solo work illustrates yet another oddity of Van Eps' career. He considered the guitar to be a "lap piano" and, as the above summary description of styles suggests, he clearly derived his concept from big bands and solo, stride-era piano players. Yet, despite the "self-sufficiency" of

his style, far more often than not he recorded in the company of others.

Some of that, like the choice of material (songs by the Beatles on the 1966 *My Guitar* LP or the pop song "Sunny" on the *Legends* CD) may be the influence of producers, A&R people from the record label, or simply Van Eps' ambivalent view of the "kind" of music he made, an ambivalence heightened by the nature of his primary playing/livelihood/recording environment. In the piece by Ted Greene, Greene asks "George, do you consider what you play to be jazz?" and Van Eps replies, "Barney [Kessel; a great jazz guitarist known for his improvisatory style and strong opinions] says no. But I can't type it. Maybe one foot is in the classical field and one is in the jazz field — it's both of them."

Both jazz and classical guitarists may take exceptions to that view. However accurately it describes the music Van Eps recorded under his own name, it does point to that part of his mastery, and

**VAN EPS**, to page 5

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**VAN EPS**, from page 4

the importance of his example for anyone interested in the hybrid of "fingerstyle jazz guitar." Van Eps brought a virtuoso right-hand technique, arguably the equal of that required for the standard classical repertoire, to bear on the body of material that singer Tony Bennett and others have described as "The Great American Songbook."

The last oddity of Van Eps' career worth noting is the instrument itself. He "invented" the 7-string guitar in that, in the late 1930s, he approached the Epiphone Company and persuaded them to build a guitar for him with an added bass string. The impetus for the design was to allow true bass-register notes to be played in any key. As he pointed out in a December 1967 *Guitar Player* article (an article timed to promote the then-new Van Eps 7-string guitar being made and sold

by Gretsch), "If you think of the 7-string instrument in terms of the 6-string tuning with an extra string, chances are that the results, if any, will be cramped and disjointed. Think seven, not six plus one ... Thinking in seven overall, thinking chromatically, you will find unlimited harmonic situations opening up." For example, with the conventional guitar, the lowest available E-flat note is in the baritone, not bass range, and adequate separation between that note as the "bass" of a chord, and other voices, is impossible. With the added low A string, that E-flat can be shifted down an octave, with little physical difficulty and a greater increase in clarity of texture.

Three years ago, when I first considered buying or ordering a 7-string guitar, Web searches on "7-string guitar" would turn up **VAN EPS**, to page 7

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- Paulo Bellinati - *Lira Brasileira*
- Dusan Bogdanovic - *Mysterious Habitats*
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**JOYNER**, from page 3

**\$14.95**

*Guitar Songs* is actually a series of books, each containing 12 or more arrangements by veteran author Jerry Silverman. Titles like *Swingin' Jazz for Guitar*, *Broadway for Guitar*, *Gershwin for Guitar*, and *Ellington for Guitar* give you an idea of the material that is offered.

Each volume contains familiar standards that are fun to play and popular with audiences. If you are a vocalist the books will appeal to you because the songs are presented with lyrics, melody lines, and chord blocks, as well as the guitar instrumental arrangements. These are fingerstyle arrangements, but they can be adapted to plectrum or pick-and-finger styles. If you are looking for ultra-hip ideas, progressions, and voicings this series is not for you. The material is intermediate level, using basic arrangement concepts.

On the other hand, if you need to learn some songs quickly for an upcoming wedding the music might be a lifesaver. It's also useful as a source for essential and easily analyzed arranging ideas.

*The Gershwin Collection for Solo Guitar*, **Howard Morgen, Warner Bros. Publications, 15800 NW 48th Ave., Miami, FL 33014. \$24.95**

Howard Morgen has many educational books and magazine columns under his belt. He is adept at explaining and teaching about fingerstyle jazz guitar. His arrangements are sophisticated, harmonically interesting, and demanding.

This time out Morgen tackles an assortment of Gershwin tunes, representing some of the very best of American songwriting. The songs were written by a pianist so it can be difficult to create convincing versions for fingerstyle guitar. Morgen's arrangements convey the needed harmonic depth and provide a satisfying point of departure. Fifteen familiar and loved songs are in the collection. Titles include a medley of "I Got Rhythm" and "Fascinating Rhythm," "Summertime," "How Long Has This Been Going On," and "They Can't Take That Away from Me." Morgen himself plays each tune on the enclosed CD. Depending on your

taste, you may find the arrangements a little dry at times — mainly because of the straightforward rhythms. Actually, that's a good thing because it leaves you room to keep the smooth jazzy feel or to "punch" them up as you see fit. Howard Morgen's clearly presented ideas are essential for anyone wanting to learn about fingerstyle jazz guitar. (A word to the wise: If you haven't checked out his book, *Concepts: Arranging for Fingerstyle Guitar*, be sure to do so.)

## VIDEO

*A Fingerstyle Summit with Adrian Legg, Martin Simpson & Ed Gerhard*, **Alfred Music Video, Alfred Publishing Co., P.O. Box 10003, Van Nuys, CA 91410-0003. \$29.95**

The summit took place at the annual National Guitar Summer Workshop in Connecticut, sponsored by Alfred Publishing Co. Each of the featured guitarists plays one of his solo instrumentals and is then interviewed by William Coulter, a capable fingerstyle player in his own right. Coulter provides

**JOYNER**, to page 7

**Q.**

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**VAN EPS**, from page 5

no listings at all. Today, a similar search will yield hundreds of sites. That's mostly the result of the interest, perhaps as much a fad as the electric sitar of the 1960s, among some heavy-metal guitarists. Several prominent players in that style have taken up the 7-string, and the Ibanez and Schechter companies are manufacturing relatively inexpensive 7-string models.

A similar, but much quieter and perhaps more enduring change is occurring in jazz. Arguably the most influential living builder of archtop (jazz) guitars, at least in North America, is Robert Benedetto. As of 1998, a significant percentage of his annual production is 7-string guitars. Part of Benedetto's influence comes through a cohort of younger luthiers who began or solidified their training by working for him and are now establishing their own names. All build 7-string models and, in at least one case (Dale Unger of Pennsylvania), the 7-string model is their chief emphasis, as it is for luthier Jimmy Foster of Louisiana, who builds both solidbody and archtop jazz guitars and is primarily known for his 7-string model.

Along with the growing numbers of luthiers building such guitars comes a growing number of players: Ron Eschete, Howard Alden, and Fred Fried have all recorded on 7-string guitar and now play it exclusively. There are many others.

I think this development will have a profound impact on fingerstyle playing in general. While the physical limitations of the acoustic instrument may be unsolvable (I recently auditioned an Ibanez acoustic 7-string guitar that sounded remarkably like a

cardboard box), the electric instrument, with its geometrically greater harmonic potential, good intonation, and warm tone, offers a vast new set of possibilities. Listen to George Van Eps and hear some of them for yourself!

George Van Eps references and sources:

Recordings as a leader:

1956: *Mellow Guitar* (Columbia, out of print)

1966: *My Guitar* (Capitol; out of print)

1967: *George Van Eps' Seven-String Guitar* (Capitol; out of print)

1968: *Soliloquy* (Capitol; out of print)

1991: *13 Strings* (Concord)

1992: *Hand-crafted Swing* (Concord)

1993: *Seven and Seven* (Concord)

1994: *Keepin' Time* (Concord)

1994: *Legends* (Concord)

Articles:

*Guitar Player*, 1967; March 1970; August 1981 (cover story)

Books:

*Harmonic Mechanisms, Volumes 1-3* (Mel Bay)

A volume of original compositions is also available from Mel Bay

Many thanks to Dave Ray for the loan of two out-of-print Van Eps' LPs. Good luck getting them back, Dave ...

*Paul Hintz plays fingerstyle jazz on a custom-built, solid-body, 7-string in the jazz/spoken word duo DuoTonic. He's counting the months until his just-ordered Dale Unger 7-string archtop is born, and hopes that his career lasts as long as George Van Eps' did, so that he can some day master volume 1 of Van Eps' Harmonic Mechanisms, which he purchased the year it was published (1980).*

**JOYNER**, from page 6

insightful questions and comments. He does a good job of evoking interesting observations from his guests on technical aspects of the performances, technique, composition, and philosophy. Each of the performers gets to express his own distinctive personality, humor, and approach to music. Adrian Legg utters amazement about his career, "I make up tunes and play them on guitar. And then people give me money. It's much better than stocking shelves."

Questions are also taken from the audience of workshop participants. As a viewer you get a good feeling of what it was like to be in the room with the group. At the same time, the clear and crisp close-ups provide a better view of the guitar playing than anyone in the audience could have seen.

The second half of the video has all three guitarists on stage with Coulter in an open discussion that ranges from altered tunings to fingernails, compositions titles, intuition in music, and the guitar in corporate America. There are meaningful insights regarding tradition vs. looking forward. Someone points out that styles that are now termed "traditional" weren't traditional when they were initially developed. They were simply the result of people playing music in the context of their own time. Martin Simpson vigorously makes this observation regarding limitations on musical spirit and inventiveness: "The moment you've said 'You can't do that' you've killed it ... Yes, I can!"

The video is fresh and unique with both entertainment and educational values. It will stand up to repeated viewings.

# MGS Member Performance Calendar

Compiled / edited by Joanne Backer and Pavel Jany

## JULY

### FRIDAY

2

PAUL HINTZ & Carole Selin, DuoTonic (voice/percussion), 8-10:30 p.m., Dunn Bros. Freight House, Mpls.

GLEN HELGESON with Axis Mundi, 8-10 p.m., St. Anthony Main, Mpls.

### SATURDAY

3

PAVEL JANY, 8-10 p.m., Borders Bookstore, Richfield.

ADAM GRANGER, 8 p.m., Contra Dance, Odd Fellows Hall, Hampden Park.

### SUNDAY

4

ADAM GRANGER, Fiddle Contest, 1 p.m., Sport Center, Blaine.

### MONDAY

5

MICHAEL HAUSER with Cuadro Flamenco at the Loring Bar, Mpls., 9:30 p.m.-12:30 a.m.

### TUESDAY

6

SCOTT FRASER with GENE SWANSON, 7-8:40 p.m., Nicollet Island Amphitheater.

SIMEON HAMBRO, 8:30-10:30 p.m. at Dunn Bros. Coffee on Grand Ave., St. Paul.

### FRIDAY

9

JAMES ALLEN, Borders Bookstore, 8-10 p.m., Richfield.

PAVEL JANY, 8-10 p.m., Borders Bookstore, Minnetonka.

JIM OUSKA & the Slim Hippos, 9:30 p.m., Blues Saloon, Western & Thomas Ave., St. Paul.

PAUL HINTZ in DuoTonic (see 7/2) 7:30 p.m. at Dunn Bros. Coffee, Lake Street, Mpls.

### SATURDAY

10

KATY TESSMAN, singer-songwriter, 8 p.m., Dunn Bros. Coffee-Freight House, 3rd Ave. S. & 2nd St., downtown Mpls. 612-692-8530.

PAUL HINTZ in DuoTonic (see 7/2), 8-10 p.m., Aroma's Coffeehouse, Zumbrota.

TIM DAVEY, 7-9 p.m., Gingko Coffeehouse, 721 N. Snelling Ave., St. Paul. 651-645-2647.

### SUNDAY

11

ADAM GRANGER, Big Top Chautauqua, 3 p.m. & 7 p.m., Bayfield, WI.

### WEDNESDAY

14

GLEN HELGESON with Axis Mundi, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. at Peavey Plaza, downtown Mpls.

### THURSDAY

15

CURTIS & LORETTA appear at the Todd County Fair in Long Prairie, MN.

### FRIDAY

16

JAMES ALLEN, with Global Jazz, 7-8 p.m., Powderhorn.

CURTIS & LORETTA, see July 15.

PAUL HINTZ, solo guitar, 8-10 p.m., Barnes & Noble in Eagan.

GLEN HELGESON, see July 2.

### SATURDAY

17

ADAM GRANGER, 6 p.m., Anoka Historical Society.

JIM OUSKA & the Slim Hippos are at St. Anthony on Main in Mpls, 7:30 p.m.

### MONDAY

19

JIM OUSKA & the Slim Hippos, 9 p.m., Famous Dave's in Uptown, Mpls.

### FRIDAY

23

KATY TESSMAN, singer-songwriter, with singer-songwriter Mike Renee, 9:00 p.m., The Java Joint, 710 St. Germain, St. Cloud, 320-656-5990.

JAMES ALLEN, 8-10 p.m., Borders Bookstore, Minnetonka.

PAVEL JANY, 8-10 p.m. Black Bear Crossings Coffee, Como Ave., St. Paul.

### SATURDAY

24

TIM DAVEY, 8-10 p.m., Maggie's Caffe Espresso, Town Centre Shoppes, 1254 Town Centre Dr., Eagan, 651-681-8522.

JAMES ALLEN with Global Jazz, 1 p.m. Lake Street Cultural Festival.

PAVEL JANY, 6:30-9:30 p.m., Blue Nile Restaurant, Mpls.

### SUNDAY

25

SCOTT FRASER with GENE SWANSON, 8-11 p.m., Vintage Restaurant, St. Paul.

ADAM GRANGER, 1 p.m., Homestead Pickin' Parlor, 6625 10th Ave. S., Richfield.

SCOTT DAVIES, guitar, with Fuego Flamenco at the Loring Bar, 9 p.m.

### MONDAY

26

PAVEL JANY, 7-9 p.m., The Coffee Grounds, Hamline Ave., St. Paul.

SCOTT DAVIES with Rincon del Flamenco at the Loring Bar, 9 p.m.

### TUESDAY

27

TONY HAUSER appears at the Kennedy Center on a live Internet broadcast, 7 p.m. CDT. Tune in at

LHP: //Kennedy-center.org/millennium

### FRIDAY

30

PAVEL JANY, 8-10 p.m., Barnes & Noble Bookstore, Eagan.

CURTIS & LORETTA at Dulono's, Lake & Garfield, Mpls. 8 p.m.-12 midnight.



## CALENDAR, from page 8

## SATURDAY

31

CURTIS &amp; LORETTA, see July 30.

MICHAEL HAUSER with Flamenco 2000 appears during the Fringe Festival in the Herbert Kahn Theatre, Plymouth Cong. Church (Nicollet & Franklin), Mpls. 1 p.m.

## AUGUST

## SUNDAY

1

CURTIS & LORETTA at the Great River Arts Festival, Little Falls, MN.

MICHAEL HAUSER, 7 p.m. (see July 31).

## MONDAY

2

MICHAEL HAUSER, at the Loring Bar (see July 5).

## TUESDAY

3

MICHAEL HAUSER, 8:30 p.m. at the Herbert Kahn Theatre, Plymouth Cong. Church (Nicollet & Franklin), Mpls.

## WEDNESDAY

4

JIM OUSKA & the Slim Hippos, noon, Northrup Auditorium Outdoor Terrace, U of M, Mpls. campus.

## THURSDAY

5

SCOTT FRASER with GENE SWANSON, Etiscoupal Church, 12-1 p.m.

MICHAEL HAUSER, 7 p.m. (see July 31).

## SATURDAY

7

MICHAEL HAUSER and Flamenco 2000 still playing the Fringe Fest, 8:30 p.m. (see July 31).

CURTIS & LORETTA are at the White Oak Rendezvous, Deer River, MN

## SUNDAY

8

CURTIS & LORETTA are at the Minn. Old Time Bluegrass Music Festival in Zimmerman, MN.

MICHAEL HAUSER returns one last time to the Herbert Kahn Theatre, 4 p.m. (see July 31).

## FRIDAY

13

GLEN HELGESON, with Bluebeat, 7:30 p.m.-9 p.m., Lake Harriet Bandshell.

## WEDNESDAY

16

GLEN HELGESON with Bluebeat, 12 noon-1 p.m., Northrop Plaza.

## WEDNESDAY

18

TONY HAUSER with Brasierada at Northrup Terrace, noon, U of M, Mpls campus.

## FRIDAY

20

SIMEON HAMBRO at Dunn Bros. Coffee on Grand Ave., St. Paul, 9 p.m.

## SUNDAY

29

SCOTT DAVIES (see July 25).

## REGULAR GIGS

SCOTT DAVIES goes solo Mondays at the Loring Bar, 6:30 p.m.

MICHAEL HAUSER, solo flamenco during Sunday brunch at the Loring Cafe, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

SCOTT DAVIES with wife Colette appear every Thurs. at the Mpls. Cafe, 11th & Hennepin, 7:30 p.m.

PAVEL JANY, every Sunday, 9 a.m.-11 a.m. at Dunn Bros. Coffee on Grand, St. Paul.

CURTIS & LORETTA will be at the Renaissance Festival every weekend starting 8/14-8/15 through the run of the festival.

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**TWIN CITIES JAZZ INFORMATION!** Call the Twin Cities Jazz Society JazzLine: 651-633-0329.

For sale: **1967 RAMIREZ 1-A** Flamenco guitar \$1,400 or B/O. Must sell, 612-721-1404.

For sale: **1940 Gibson SJ45 Bannerhead Model**, beautiful sunburst. Exc. cond. balanced tone, \$2,100. Chris Silver, 651-644-7924.

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