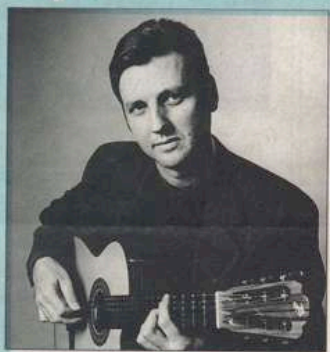
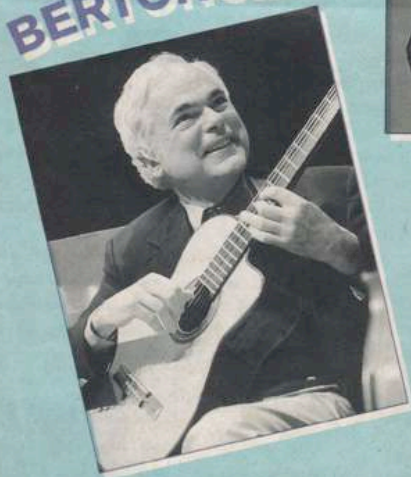


★ CLASSIC JAZZ

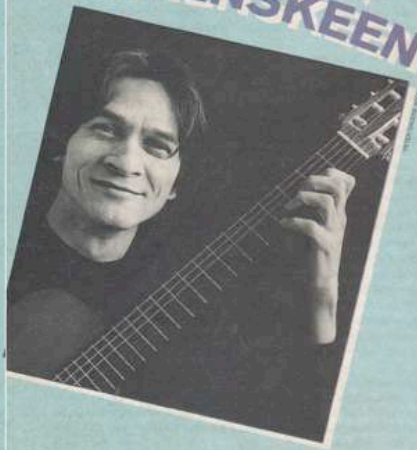
★ KEN ★
HATFIELD



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ACOUSTIC GUITAR JANUARY 2002

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Gene Bertoncini, Ken Hatfield, and Olaf Tarenskeen combine a love of nylon-string guitar with a jazz sensibility

By Ron Forbes-Roberts

Ever since swing guitar pioneer Charlie Christian joined the Benny Goodman Orchestra in 1939, the electric guitar has been, with few exceptions, the instrument of choice for jazz guitarists. By the 1950s, however, the playing of Andrés Segovia and his protégés had turned many jazz guitarists on to the warm, intimate sound of the classical guitar. Charlie Byrd switched from an electric archtop to the nylon-string after hearing classical guitar music in the early '50s. Soon afterward he was invited to Spain to study with Segovia. But jazz remained Byrd's first love, and during his long career he made more than 100 albums featuring nylon-string guitar in a jazz format.

Hatfield sees a growing place in jazz for nylon-string guitar, particularly for its possibilities as part of the rhythm section. "The classical guitar lends itself to that, and that's a natural place for it to go," he explains. "You won't find it taking over the role of a piano or archtop in a big band, but you might find it taking over the role of the piano in a smaller band. I would like nothing better than to do what Jim Hall did on Sonny Rollins' record *The Bridge*." This is essentially the role of his guitar on *Dyat*, his most recent and most straight-

ahead jazz CD to date. His nylon-string is featured as both a lead and rhythm section instrument—in the company of violin, drums, bass, and, occasionally, singer—playing a set of originals with influences ranging from blues to bossa to bop.

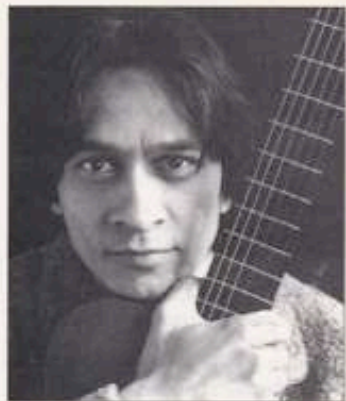
Like Bertoncini, Hatfield advises those interested in using nylon-string in a jazz idiom to listen closely to Brazilian music. "While the feel of Brazilian music is different than jazz, it's a good place to enter because it's music that really makes sense on the classical guitar," he says. "The instrument has a major role to

play, and it addresses a lot of what makes jazz great—harmonic sophistication, melodic invention, and rhythmic drive."

Like a Monk

Unlike Bertoncini and Hatfield, Olaf Tarenskeen came to jazz with an extensive classical guitar background, having spent eight years studying the instrument at the Royal Conservatory of the Hague. Tarenskeen was in his early 20s when he developed an interest in jazz and began to improvise and compose on both electric and classical guitar. Since then he has released a number of recordings, including two CDs of solo guitar pieces that meld his jazz and classical influences into a highly personal musical language.

Born in the Hague, Holland, in 1960, Tarenskeen grew up in a family that listened to an array of artists, including Sinatra, Bach, Art Tatum, and Joe Pass. He began playing classical guitar at the age of ten. "In my memory, what inspired me to play and keep on playing was a television performance of Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* played by John Williams," he recalls. After taking lessons with a local teacher for a few years, he began studying at the Royal Conservatory of the



Olaf Tarenskeen: intriguing improviser.

Hague with Uruguayan guitarist Antonio Pereira Arias, a former pupil of Segovia. Tarenskeen became absorbed with the playing of Segovia, Williams, Julian Bream, and the Abreu Brothers but was also listening to what he refers to as the "pop music" of Baden Powell, José Feliciano, and Antonio Carlos Jobim.

Although he had long listened to and enjoyed jazz, he didn't begin to study it seriously until a few years after he graduated from the conservatory. "I started to

make arrangements of jazz standards for nylon-string guitar," Tarenskeen recalls. "But I did not know how to improvise. My musical nature was to play composed music. All my technical skills, especially those concerning the right hand, were to serve the interpretation of the composition." Tarenskeen began to study jazz on electric guitar using a pick and spent the next few years learning jazz theory while receiving instruction from various musicians, including bassist Dave Holland.

But Tarenskeen eventually decided to apply his jazz skills to his original instrument. "There were two main reasons for wanting to play improvised and my own music on a nylon-string," he says. "The first was hearing Ralph Towner and deciding to compose and play nonmainstream jazz. The second was that I also wanted to do what Joe Pass was doing on his solo albums, but with my own techniques." He also returned to classical right-hand technique on both nylon-string and electric. "After studying bebop and mainstream jazz on electric guitar for a few years, I began to notice my limitations in playing with a pick," he says. "I just could not play fast enough." He began playing single-note lines with his fingers, and after some help from Kevin Eubanks, he developed a right-hand approach that allowed him more control at fast tempos. "[Eubanks] showed me how to use the thumb to root you down so you start descending runs with the thumb and continue with *i m p*, using the thumb to 'bounce' on a lower string alternately with the index finger," he explains. "So you combine the thumb at crucial places with *i m*. I stress the word *crucial*, because the technique depends on your knowledge of bebop lines and swing feel." Tarenskeen practices paradiddle patterns like *i p p m i p i m p m i o r i p i p i p p* for single-note lines "in every kind of thinkable variation," and he uses a combination of legato, pull-off, and hammer-on techniques to articulate his phrases as fluidly as possible. But his approach to phrasing depends on the moment. "In certain types of expression, articulation is not that important," he says. "The sloppy playing is the expression. Some classical guitar purists cannot stand this!"

Tarenskeen began composing while studying jazz. "But I didn't study composition formally," he says. "With my teachers, I analyzed jazz compositions and solos mainly by transcribing them from records, as any other jazz student would do." In particular, Tarenskeen scrutinized the music of Ralph Towner, Pat Metheny, Mike Brecker, and Herbie Hancock. His pieces arise by experimenting with harmonic pro-

gressions and melody until a form begins to emerge. "Basically I compose tunes by finding a comfortable chord progression that I can improvise on," he says. "During this process I try to find a melody and harmonize it or fit a melody over a chord progression. Then I try to create a feeling of the unexpected somewhere in the piece—a mood change or something dramatic." He is intrigued by the idea of bringing this process to live performances. "My musical goal is to improvise as much as I can," he says. "To do a concert without using any fixed tunes would be ideal."

Tarenskeen advises classical guitarists who are interested in playing jazz to learn as much about the idiom as possible. "The most practical thing is to just learn everything about jazz," he says, "chord voicings, standards, or bossa novas, as well as learning to harmonize the melody with root chords and inversions and working out smooth chord voicings. Study jazz rhythms and then find a guitar that doesn't play too heavy, especially in the higher positions." Tarenskeen acknowledges the rarity of classical guitar in jazz. "There are not many jazz nylon-string players because it takes so much time to master classical technique and then develop it within a jazz concept," he says and adds with a chuckle, "It's a great project for a monk!" ■

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