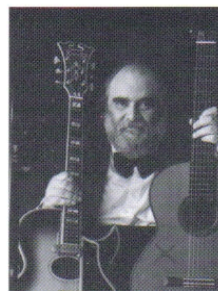


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Jack Cecchini

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THE PUBLICATION FOR THE JAZZ GUITAR ENTHUSIAST

No. 56 AUGUST 2008

Jeff Barone



Mark Elf's Guitar Conservatory

Interviews

Jeff Barone • Jack Cecchini
Luthier Bryant Trenier • Tom Wolfe
Carlos Barbosa-Lima

Music

Always
Stardust
I Can't Get Started: Two arrangements
I'm Through With Love
The Wes Side of Heaven
Our Love Is Here To Stay

Lessons

The Power of Triads
Writing Music for Jazz Guitar Performance
Comping Like a Pianist
How To Spice Up Your Own Jazz Lines
by Using Changing Tones
Plus More...

Product Review

Eastman John Pisano Model

Book Excerpt

Tal Farlow: Up North

Portrait of Bill Leavitt
Catching Up with Bucky Pizzarelli

LISTENING TEST
with Howard Alden

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Bryant Trenier 17" Non-cutaway

Q and A with Jeff Barone

by Ed Benson



EB: What led you to learn the guitar, and when did you start?

JB: I believe I started playing around age 7 or 8. My parents bought me a guitar for Christmas, and shortly after, I started lessons with my cousin, Joe Stagnitta who owned a music store. I didn't ask for it (laughter).

EB: Were your parents supportive? Did you set out to become a musician?

JB: My parents have always been very supportive towards music, though they were concerned when everything in my life became music. In regard to setting out to be a musician, I would say the process was gradual.

EB: Did you study formally, and if so, with whom and for how long? What did you practice?

JB: Well, as I mentioned, I studied with my cousin, studying mainly method books up until I was about

twelve years old. From there I worked with another local guitarist named Joe Jewell. Joe was well versed in just about any style. Early on, I studied electric with Joe, then focused on classical guitar. This was probably from age 13 to around 16 or 17 years old. From there I studied with another classical guitarist named Tim Schmidt while in my last year of high school. From there I studied with a guitarist named Ed Flower at Ithaca College. He was an excellent classical guitarist and had a very carefree attitude toward music and guitar. Basically he taught me to lighten up (laughter). In regard to practice schedule, I can't say I've had a real routine, but I would play for hours and would love the challenge of something I couldn't do easily. It has never felt like work to me; if it did I probably wouldn't do it. But don't get me wrong, it has always been a serious thing for me.

EB: Tell me about your years in college and grad school in studying the guitar/music. What was the most important thing you got out of the education? Did your classical training help in developing your jazz chops?

JB: My early years in college were hectic. I first went to Onondaga Community College where my parents thought it would be good for me to figure out what I wanted to do. It was here that I continued to study classical guitar with Tim Schmidt. I focused on a lot of renaissance and baroque guitar as well as sight-reading. Outside of school I was transcribing and listening to music non-stop. More importantly I gained invaluable professional experience at this time. I was constantly playing with local jazz groups, r&b groups, funk groups, and whatever else there was to do. I would be into any kind of music as long as I was playing. It was from there I moved out of Syracuse and attended Ithaca College.

EB: After leaving school, what was your first paying gig?

JB: Just out of high school, my first real professional gig was working with singer Al Martino (he plays Johnny Fontaine in the Godfather movies) along with Tony Riposo conducting and playing piano. Out of grad school in NYC I got a gig working with an organist/singer Jimmy "Preacher" Robins. I worked with him almost exclusively for about a year throughout the Harlem club scene in the mid-nineties. He played a wide range of jazz, blues, r&b and gospel. He was a very old-school kind of guy. Every guitar player in

"Jeff has been a friend of mine for a long time. I admire his playing, his great musicianship and his spirit. He can play so many different styles and he is constantly working on his craft. It's admirable the way he can create beautiful colors on his chosen instrument. I also think Jeff is a most wonderful producer. He produced my record and several others. To have Jeff in the studio listening and giving his expert ears to a project is as good as it gets. His new CD is a real treat for all to hear."

Jack Wilkins 2008

New York probably worked with him at one time or another.

EB: When did you decide to move to N.Y., and why? Since the competition is so fierce in N.Y. did you think it might be difficult to break in?

JB: I always wanted to be in New York when I became interested in jazz and realized that this is where the majority of players I was listening to were living. Another part of it (my excuse, at least) was to get my Master's degree to fulfill my certification in music education. In regard to competition, I never thought about it; I just wanted to play. I just always knew it would work out somehow.

EB: You've done numerous live performances. Would you tell us about the more interesting ones?

JB: I worked with trumpeter Tom Harrell's group a short while ago. One day someone phoned me saying that he was calling for Tom Harrell and that he would like to hire me for an upcoming concert in Massachusetts. I thought someone was pulling a joke on me. The next day Tom called me personally to confirm the offer, and said he was in the process of writing some new music and that we would do a rehearsal a day before the concert. I showed up to the rehearsal and saw that some of the music was written in piano staff with very specific voicings. Some of it was pretty demanding and a challenge to adapt on guitar. I've always been a fan of Tom as a player and composer. I don't think I've ever been as nervous as I was at this performance. I couldn't even feel my legs. Another memorable performance was filling in for Jack Wilkins for a big band gig. Well, that at least was what he told me. It was up in New Hartford, Connecticut, for an outdoor concert; no rehearsal, all sight-reading. I recognized a lot of the players and thought, this is a great band. After the first number, they talked about the band's history a little to the audience and it turns out I was working with the Village Vanguard Orchestra! They added guitar because there was a vocalist singing with the group, as well as a feature

with vibraphonist Warren Chaisson, who also had a guitar book. Wilkins also told me I had to wear a tux, which I thought was strange since it was the middle of the summer and we were playing outdoors. When I showed up, everybody was wearing their most comfortable summer outfits! Thanks, Jack! (laughter).

EB: Any disastrous gigs you can share with us? Any memorable studio gigs?

JB: I have a couple that come to mind, one being a gig at a jazz club in Harlem. During the last set, around 3 am, three guys came into the club with guns and robbed the place as we were playing. Back then I just played and blocked everything out and didn't even notice there was a guy standing in front of me with a sawed off shot gun. The great trumpet player, Charles McGee, was on the gig that night, and he dragged me down a stairwell (with my guitar and cable dragging down the stairs) where we hid out for the remainder of the robbery. Another was the Bell Atlantic Jazz Festival in New York, where I was scheduled to play with jazz organists Reuben Wilson and Big John Patton. It was billed as the Blue Note Organ Summit, or something to that effect. Not only was I playing guitar, I was also the "music director" and had written the charts of the tunes we were going to play. The day of the show I had a freak accident in my apartment and cut my index finger (on my right hand) very badly just hours before the sound check/rehearsal. I knew the cut need stitches and I went to St. Luke's Hospital on the upper west side. I waited there for six hours before they could see me. It turned out I had severed the digital nerve in my finger. It's a main nerve that provides touch and feel. They stitched up my finger and told me I would need a separate surgery to reconnect the digital nerve. I didn't make the concert. Soon after the stitches came out I played a festival with Reuben down in West Virginia, and it was one of the strangest playing experiences I've had. I had absolutely no feeling in that finger and it was hard to tell at times whether I was holding the pick-and forgetting to use that finger for finger-style. After that gig I decided to schedule the surgery. They

sutured the nerve together; it is less than half the size of a human hair. Pretty amazing! Well, on a lighter note, I've definitely have had some memorable studio gigs. Or in this case a forgettable one that became memorable. I did a session that called for acoustic steel-string; just some rhythm guitar on a country tune called "I've Got Spurs that Jingle Jangle Jingle." On some sessions I'm not even quite sure where the song was being used since some sessions were buys-outs (you get a one-time fee for the session). Months later I was bored and decided to rent "Jack Ass 2: The Movie." If you're not familiar with "Jack Ass," it originated from a show from MTV where the guys do really crazy, outlandish stuff. Well, I got through about a quarter of the movie and they came to a scene that involved a horse. Well, to my surprise and horror there's my acoustic guitar strumming along while a horse and the viewer are about to be traumatized. That's all I can say about that. If you've seen the movie you'll know what I'm talking about.



Jeff playing on a track for Jack Wilkins upcoming CD.

EB: Are you teaching, and if so where? What method/books do you use? Can jazz be taught?

JB: I teach guitar at the Trevor Music Conservatory in Manhattan. The method books vary depending on the student. I can't say I have one book I use from cover to cover. I think that is something that is greatly lacking in the education field in regard to a real standard text for guitar players. Jazz can be taught if the student is really listening to the kind of music you're trying to teach him. If the student says he/she wants to learn how to play jazz but in their spare time they listen to nothing but rock (or classical or what ever it may be), it's sort of an uphill battle.

EB: Whom did you admire in your early years as you were developing as a guitarist?

JB: Joe Pass was the first jazz guitarist I heard. In six or seventh grade a friend convinced me to attend a stage band rehearsal. The director put a chart in front of me and it said "play ala Joe Pass." No problem, just play it like Joe Pass. At that age I had no idea who Joe Pass was. My cousin Greg Barone is an excellent jazz pianist and he had a good record collection, and just by coincidence (around that time), he played me an Oscar Peterson record that had Joe Pass on it. I believe it was the one called "The Trio." I went to the record store to find another Joe Pass recording and I bought "Virtuoso." I couldn't believe guitar could sound like that, and I was determined to explore jazz much further. From there I went and bought just about any jazz guitar recording I could find-Django, Charlie Christian, Wes, Jim Hall, George Benson, John Scofield, John Abercrombie, Jack Wilkins, and the list goes on and on. I would say my early favorites would have to be Pass, Benson, Martino, Wilkins and Scofield. Wouldn't that be a great guitar quintet? At that time I loved the Joe Pass "Django" record. George Benson's "Cookbook" and Jack McDuff's "Live" with George were a couple of favorites. For Martino, I would have to say "Consciousness" and "Exit." The Scofield records I had were "Shinola," "Electric Outlet" and "Still Warm." The first Jack Wilkins recordings I heard were "You Can't Live Without It" and "Captain Blue," and I was completely awestruck by the total virtuosity of his playing. He seemed to have all the best aspects of all the players I was listening to up to that point.

EB: Has your playing changed since you left school, and in what way?

JB: I hope so; it's been about twelve or thirteen years since I was in school. I think my playing has become more refined. Also, I try to be open and to accompany as best as I can. I think the longer you play, the more you learn to pace yourself better and pay attention to the nuances.

EB: Your approach to learning the fingerboard?

JB: Sight-reading from flute and saxophone étude books is very helpful. Reading from transcription books in general helps also.

EB: Your CD "Crazy Talk" was very well received. Tell me about the latest CD. Any plans for future

recordings or CD/DVDs etc? Do CDs still appear viable since everyone appears to be downloading material.

JB: I'm very proud of the new CD. It's called "Open Up," and it was just released on the Jazzed Media label (JazzedMedia.com). It has a mix of standards, originals with electric and nylon-string guitars. Like "Crazy Talk" the recording was co-produced by Jack Wilkins and features Joe Magnarelli, trumpet (Harry Connick, Jack McDuff, Ray Baretto); Mike Dubaniewicz, sax (Maynard Ferguson, Diane Schur); Ron Oswanski, b-3 organ (Maynard Ferguson, Blood Sweat and Tears); Rudy Petschauer, drums (Jack McDuff, Renee Rosnes; and Jack on two duet numbers with me. I co-produced a recording for guitarist Jim Silberstein this year that was released on the CAP label. It's an excellent recording that features Harvie S. (co-producer), Eric Alexander, Jim Rotondi, Jill McCarron, Vince Cherico and Daniel Sadownick. Jim is a terrific guitarist who also has great left and right hand technique. Very high energy, which I love! I'm also very excited about the new Jack Wilkins record, which I produced. It is set to release this September on the Max Jazz Label. It's called "Until It's Time," and features Jack, Jon Cowherd, Steve LaSpina and Mark Ferber, and I play guitar on one track. Jack picked his favorite songs, which ranged from classical, pop songs, a Spanish guitar piece, songs from movies, to jazz standards. It's definitely a straight-ahead recording and it has some of the best quartet playing I've heard. Jack sounds amazing and is definitely at the top of his game. This record is for all kinds of listeners. This is going to be a recording to remember. In regard to future recordings, I'm in the process of finishing a recording for sax player Mike Dubaniewicz. I produced and played guitar. It's a straight-ahead record with Roger Lent, Kris Jensen, Ron Oswanski, Vince Ector and Samuel Torres. We just finished the mix and sent it off for mastering. I'm looking forward to the release. Jack Wilkins and I have a project we've been thinking of doing based around more obscure songs from the American Songbook. Jack has had a series of trio concerts at Grace Church in White Plains, N.Y. that has involved Jack, me and a bass player. They've been very well received and we're hoping to do a studio project based on some of that material. Do I think CDs are still viable? Yes, on some level. Artists will still need a physical product to sell on gigs, and so on. In regard to CD stores, I think they may be something of the past. However, I do think there are still people out there who want the physical

product. I know I do. I like having the artwork and liner notes in my hand to check out as I'm listening.

EB: What's the future for jazz and jazz education? How can it be kept alive?

JB: I think it is being kept alive on some level. The number of people interested in playing and learning jazz is at an all-time high. In regard to visibility, I think jazz has definitely fallen out of the mainstream. You very rarely see jazz on television anymore. Definitely not on any of the major networks today. Even the Grammys sort of push that category off to the side. One exception would be Herbie Hancock winning Album of the Year. But hey, he's Herbie Hancock. I love the scene at the beginning of the movie "Tommy Boy," where Chris Farley is taking an exam and the final question is "One of the Founding Fathers of the Declaration of Independence is _____" Hancock. He gives a very cocky look to the camera then fills in the name Herbie in the blank (Laughter).

EB: What wisdom from a mentor have you received that you abide by?

JB: A very wise guitarist told me these wise words, "Don't Suck" I think it was Wilkins. Just kidding (laughter). One important thing I have observed from working guitarists I respect is that they are always prepared to handle just about anything that comes at them. This includes different styles, good time, good energy and all around versatility. Then there are other basic traits such as being on time, being easy to get along with, and being well dressed. In general, be as consistent as you can be.



Jeff and Gunther Schuller at SIR rehearsing.



EB: Do you listen to music critics and do they bother or inspire you?

JB: Critics are important in this industry. Whether you like it or not, a lot of people listen to what they have to say. I want my music to be liked, but in general I always feel that I could be much better and need to practice more.

EB: In N.Y. are there many paying venues to perform in? If not, how does a jazz guitarist make a living in N.Y. or any of the major cities?

JB: Yes, there are definitely paying venues to perform in. It does feel like the jazz clubs are dwindling. Regardless, I've never been able to make my living exclusively from jazz. There are guys out there who definitely do, but I have had to supplement my income from other sources, such as Broadway pit orchestras, studio, clubs, private events and teaching.

EB: What guitarists today do you enjoy listening to, and why?

JB: I've been checking out some Johnny Smith recordings lately, as well as some Hank Garland. But honestly, I've been listening to more piano players lately. I just love what's harmonically possible on the piano. I'm not a frustrated pianist playing guitar; I gave up on that a long time ago, but does it get any better than Bill Evans or Oscar Peterson?

EB: Tell me about your gear-guitar/amp, etc.

JB: My newest piece of gear is a DiCarlo nylon-string guitar, and it's absolutely amazing. The tone and intonation are incredible. Rich is one of the best nylon guitar makers around. For electrics I play a 1967 Gibson L7 (with Kent Armstrong pickup) and a 1985 Gibson 335. Other than that I have a Martin steel-string and a Fender Stratocaster. In terms of amplifiers, my main

amp is a 1969 Fender Vibrolux that I use for my L7, 335 and a Fender Strat. For more acoustic stuff, I have a Roland acoustic amp I just bought. The jury's still out on that one. I also have an old Polytone and a Tech 21 combo amp.

EB: Any advice to aspiring guitarists?

JB: Yes, "Don't Suck." Seriously, just have a love for what you are doing and don't lose it. Always remember what drew you to the music in the first place. I'm a professional guitarist and there's a lot of work I do that may not be my favorite work, but that doesn't prevent me from caring about it. No matter what I'm doing I want the other players to have the same passion I do.

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Edward Blanco, eJazzNews.com

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