We whose musical bent inclines toward fingerstyle acoustic guitar are sometimes characterized as antediluvians with a horror, both innate and ideological, of technology. Of course, the video which this text accompanies exists thanks to technology, as does the guitar, acoustic or otherwise. Those of us who have hungered to see a favorite guitarist play a beguiling passage over and over till we ‘get it’ can now, with the push of a button or two, have just that. Suddenly, we are in control of our masters.

There are several levels on which this video, and others of its kind, can be helpful. The performances here are performances, not lessons, but the pause and rewind buttons create a tutorial subtext. Closer scrutiny becomes an option. And while most viewers of this video are probably guitar players, there’s a good chance you aren’t only a guitar player. Even if you are one of the few of us whose career is that of guitar player, your life isn’t only about guitar. Other levels of experience engage you. And the same is true of the remarkable guitarists in this video. Neither they nor their music exist in a vacuum. The personalities of the musicians is conveyed via a complex dance of flesh, wire, and wood. What we hear is expressive not only of an instrumental medium (fingerstyle guitar) but of a myriad of extra-musical elements and of the milieus where the musicians shaped their music.

The clips of Bert Jansch, for example, convey the ambience of the English folk pubs in which his introspective music was forged. Jorma Kaukonen, who, with bassist Jack Casady, became Hot Tuna in 1970, seemingly turned away from Jefferson Airplane stardom for something more elemental: ‘Unplugged’ before rockers-gone-acoustic was cliche. Leo Kottke shows us why he became a 1970s ‘guitar hero’ without executing a single right arm pinwheel, while John Fahey offers the roots of Kottke (and a whole ‘American primitive guitar’ school) in his own deceptively simple synthesis of American blues and everything from hymns to ragas. Preston Reed’s ‘acoustic funk’ suggests a response to influences beyond the oft-times insular realm of acoustic guitar instrumentalists. Each of the ten performers in this video is engaging in an active dialogue with us, the audience, and with a host of influences. Each is taking a step beyond the footfalls of those influences. As much as anything, the theme of these New Dimensions and Explorations is evolution.

The evolution we witness is both stylistic and technological. Is Adrian Legg’s fiberglass instrument with Scruggs-style
tuners the same guitar as John Fahey’s vintage Bacon & Day? Technology rises to serve stylistic changes, and style meets the available technology. On the Big Screen of guitar evolution, the roughly 30 years represented by this video signals a brilliant but brief blip. “In the beginning,” sarodist Buddadev Das Gupta told a UCLA audience in 1993, “there was the hunter’s bow.” Das Gupta was explaining the evolution of North India’s sarod, but his starting point would apply to any member of the family of stringed instruments (chordophones). The hunter’s bow’s close kin, the mouth bow, can still be heard making music in some parts of the world. (In Central Africa, it can be heard charming genies whose job it is to guard animals from hunters.) “Apollo the god of archers is also Apollo the god of music,” writes Frederic V. Grunfeld in The Art and Times of the Guitar, “a circumstance that might reasonably be explained by the dualism of the bow.” Fingerstyle guitarists are thus Apollonian, as they replicate the primal pluck of the hunter’s bow each time they play. (Traditionally, Dionysians favor wind instruments, though rumor has it they traded their panpipes for a Strat and a stack of Marshalls twenty-some years ago.)

Looking a few rungs up the evolutionary ladder from the mouth bow, we see sexy courtesans on Egyptian tomb walls playing a long-necked lute called a nefer. It more closely resembles the sentir still played by Moroccan Gnawa musicians than the guitar, but the 3400 year-old images tell us the Pharaohs were entertained by something distantly akin to the guitar. So, too, were the Christian crusaders who sought to reclaim Jerusalem but were seduced by Arabic culture and later transformed the oud into the lute of medieval courts.

During the late renaissance, the egalitarian guitar began edging out the courtly lute. “It has none of the inconveniences to which the lute is subject,” wrote Luis de Briceno in 1626. “Neither smoke nor heat nor cold nor dampness can incommode it...And as further proof of the value of my guitar, ask yourself whether kings, princes and gentlemen lay aside the guitar for the lute as they now leave the lute for the guitar?”

Along with “kings, princes and gentlemen,” the voluptuaries of Charles II’s court took to the guitar. “You were as sure to see a guitar on a lady’s toilet, “ wrote Count Grammont, “as rouge and patches.” In America, Ben Franklin championed it, and there was some populist enthusiasm for the guitar in the early decades of the American republic. Stephen Foster wrote for guitar, and his more sentimental side reflected the literature
for guitar when it was primarily a lady’s parlor instrument. The more boisterous banjo and fiddle, however, were the frontier folk instruments of 19th century America.

But mass production and mail order changed all that. By the last decades of the 19th century, cheap guitars flooded America via Sears Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, and similar commerce-minded friends of folk music. The genteel parlor instrument became a roughly-banged ‘second’ (rhythm accompaniment) to fiddlers across America, and a host of new, unorthodox approaches to guitar sprang up among musicians who lacked formal training but not imagination. Some tried to replicate the syncopation and clear register separation of ragtime piano on the guitar; others discovered they could imitate train whistles and human cries by sliding some smooth object up the strings. African-Americans were in the vanguard of those who liberated the guitar from the parlor. In the late 19th century, with sudden access to a remarkable instrument, they planted the seeds for much of the music seen/heard on this video.

In 1626, Luis de Briceno had argued that the guitar was easy to play, easy to maintain, and an egalitarian delight: “Two thousand people now entertain themselves and express their thoughts and troubles through the guitar.” Three hundred years later in America, guitarists as diverse as Nick Lucas and Blind Lemon Jefferson were further popularizing the instrument via recordings. A few years later still millions of Americans tuned in radios to hear the young Bing Crosby croon to the dulcet accompaniment of Eddie Lang. And the movies spawned a generation of future guitarists in the 1930s, thanks to the inspiration of singing (and strumming) cowboy, Gene Autry. (The mail order companies helped again, selling kid-sized Gene Autry guitars.) Many of the guitarists on this video felt the impact of Elvis’s 1950s television appearances. His guitar may have been mainly a prop, but it was a potent one. And Scotty Moore, he wasn’t kidding. The guitar has been ‘user friendly’ in the ways its renaissance champion said, and it has also proven ‘media friendly’ in our century. This dvd is further evidence.

Looking at it, there are at least three major traditions in evidence, and considerable exchange among them. John Fahey is the father of a school of ‘American primitive’ (his term) guitarists, self-taught artists who borrowed from folk roots and blended them with varied influences. Fahey’s introspection, more than his folk/blues roots inspired Will Ackerman and other guitarists identified with the ‘New Age’ music of the
1980s. For Fahey, whose introspection tends towards expressionist angularity rather than impressionistic pastels, this is not a happy legacy.

At about the same time Fahey was discovering blues and country guitarists in America, Davey Graham was absorbing the lessons Big Bill Broonzy left his European fans, and mixed them with music reflecting Britain. Bert Jansch is one of several remarkable guitarists who came up in the 1960s and advanced British approaches to fingerstyle guitar. All point to Graham as the fountainhead of their movement and to Broonzy as its initial catalyst.

Brad Jones and Adrian Legg reflect very different responses to the inspiration of American country guitar styles. Merle Travis brought a blues-and-jazz influenced style from western Kentucky to nationwide attention, and such disciples as Chet Atkins, Doc Watson, Jerry Reed, and Scotty Moore further refined and popularized it. The roots of ‘Travis picking’ bear resemblance to the ragtime-inspired ‘Piedmont style’ guitar best exemplified by Rev. Gary Davis and Blind Boy Fuller. Similarly, fingerstyle blues is at the base of the ‘family tree’ of Fahey’s school and, for that matter, the English and European players.

Each of these ten artists is an original, and each, too, is part of a larger cultural continuum. Unalloyed originality is either mythic or infantile. These artists are neither, and their example may inspire you to find your own New Dimensions and Explorations on fingerstyle guitar.
Peter Finger brings a fusion jazz sensibility to an instrument and style seldom associated with it and brilliantly demonstrates the dynamic range of fingerstyle guitar. Finger grew up in a musical household (his father is a symphony conductor) in Weimar, Germany, where his early studies of the violin were rewarded with prizes in the national music competition, “Jugend musiziert.” The wunder-kind took up the guitar at 13, and made his first album, aptly titled *Finger Picking* (ALP 190), at age 19. Two albums for Stefan Grossman’s Kicking Mule label in the early 1970s, *Guitar Instrumentals* (SNKF 104) and *Bottleneck Guitar Solos* (SNKF 105), quickly followed, as did extensive European tours. Finger’s range of influences and abilities is evident in such albums as *Acoustic Rock Guitar* (SNKF 144) and *Neue Wege* (SF 8015) with saxophonist Charlie Mariano. (One critic likened Finger to “an acoustic Jimi Hendrix.”) Though little known in America, Finger’s gifts as guitarist and composer for radio, film, and television keep him busy in Europe. You never know were those early violin lessons will lead.

*Niemandsland* (AM 1001)
*Live* (EC 418/10)
*Neue Wege* (SF 8015)
*Im Labyrinth* (SF 5013)
*Windspiele* (SF 8006)

Finger’s recordings are available via his label, *Acoustic Music Records, Postfach 1945, 49009 Osnabruck, Germany.*
Bert Jansch

Born in Glasgow and raised in Edinburgh, Jansch has been a dominant force on Britain’s folk scene since 1965, when his first album (*Bert Jansch*, TRA 125) appeared. Jansch’s version of Davey Graham’s *Angie* became a fingerpicker’s standard covered by (among others) Paul Simon. His collaborations with John Renbourn set a new standard for imaginative guitar duets, and the diverse elements Jansch and Renbourn filtered through their fingers (English folk, American jazz and blues, etc.) took on further dimensions when they teamed with bassist Danny Thompson, drummer Terry Cox and vocalist Jacqui McShee to form Pentangle. Pentangle’s evocative and eclectic modern chamber music came to be dubbed (to Jansch’s chagrin) folk-baroque. Since Pentangle’s initial disbandment in 1973, Jansch has worked extensively as a solo performer, with fiddler-mandocellist Martin Jenkins, and, on occasion, with a reformed Pentangle. His two performances in this set illustrate both his clean articulation and his imaginative way with a traditional song. In *Black Waterside*, Jansch uses a D-A-D-G-B-E tuning with reflective punch and panache. His distinctive off-rhythms and string snapping are legacies of his jazz and blues influences which Jansch in turn passed on to Pierre Bensusan.

*The Best of Bert Jansch* (Shanachie)

*Jansch & Renbourn / After The Dance* (Shanachie)

*The Ornament Tree* (Run River Records)

*Sketches* (Temple Records)

*Pentangle / Early Classics* (Shanachie)

*Pentangle / So Early In The Spring* (Green Linnet)

*Pentangle / Think Of Tomorrow* (Green Linnet)
Adrian Legg

Like another English-born guitarist, Albert Lee, Legg brings a refreshingly un-Southern (yet simpatico) approach to country guitar. His first instrument was oboe, but Legg abandoned it when he heard Lonnie Mack’s Wham! He played electric guitar in several country bands before embarking on his unique version of semi-acoustic fingerstyle guitar. Since 1991, Legg has recorded four albums for the Relativity label, two of which (Mrs. Crowe’s Waltz and Wine, Women & Waltz) are devoted to the revival of 3/4 time. (“I like waltzes,” says Legg, “I think they’re an under-exploited form...People used to be conceived because of waltzes.”) The non-waltzes heard in this video illustrate the legacy of guitarist Clarence White and electric banjoist Buck Trent, both of whom played instruments with ‘string bender’ effects which replicated the sound of the pedal steel guitar. Legg has ‘Scruggs style’ tuners and a very light G string on his instrument. Along with the lessons of White and Trent, Legg has absorbed influences from Chet Atkins and his disciples, Jerry Reed and Lenny Breau. Legg mixes his influence in an appealingly original way, winning him “Best Acoustic Finger Stylist” in Guitar Player’s reader’s poll. Like a veteran ‘reader’s poll’ champ for whom Legg has opened, Leo Kottke, Legg was drawn to the multi-linear guitar from a uni-linear wind instrument. (For Kottke, it was trombone.) “With the guitar,” explains Legg, “you can hold a whole piece of music, whereas if you play trumpet or oboe, you can only do bits of a piece of music. You can do a whole piece on the piano, but you don’t hold it. There’s a kind of intimacy with yourself that can happen with the guitar.”

Guitars and Other Cathedrals (Relativity)
Guitar for Mortals (Relativity)
Mrs. Crowe’s Blue Waltz (Relativity)
Wine, Women & Waltz (Relativity)
Fingerpicking & Open Tunings -Video Lesson (Hot Licks)
Jorma Kaukonen

Though his heroes were Blind Blake and Rev. Gary Davis, Jorma Kaukonen emerged as one of the sultans of psychedelia in 1967 via his trips with the Jefferson Airplane. The influential San Francisco rock band was losing some of its momentum by 1970, when Kaukon-en and his long-time friend (and Airplane bassist) Jack Casady formed Hot Tuna as a ‘side project’ from the often-grounded Airplane. There they were free to explore their roots as well as experiment outside the sometimes-volatile band. The first performance here is a bluesy jam which suggests, in a different context, some of the innovative spirit of the Jansch-Ren-bourn duets. Casady was originally an electric jazz guitarist and here he plays chordal bass (and even in one section, flamenco-inspired runs). Jorma’s guitar playing is at times an acoustic simulation of his reverb-and-distortion-laden solos with the Airplane. But if the first performance suggests acoustic (and vocalless) Airplane music, the second is archetypal Hot Tuna, a Gary Davis-inspired arrangement of Hesitation Blues. In the years since these clips of the young Tunas, Kaukonen has been busy playing and teaching both his rock and his roots. “I love the acoustic guitar,” he told Guitar Player’s Jas Obrecht. “It’s a complete, portable instrument. It’s like being able to play an acoustic piano, but you can carry it around. I find it a very sensuous instrument.”

Jorma (RCA)
Hot Tuna (RCA)
Magic (Relix Records)
Quab (Relix Records)
Live At Sweetwater (Relix Records)
The Acoustic Guitar Of Jorma Kaukonen (Homespun Video)
When his dad wasn’t working on the Ames, Iowa police force, he was starring on one of those once-ubiquitous ‘live’ country radio shows, The Buster Jones Show. Older brother Ron was fingerpicking a la Merle Travis and Chet Atkins, so it was fairly natural for Brad Jones to follow in the family tradition. As is evident from the autographs on his classical-style guitar, Jones wears his influences proudly, primarily that of the wise guy who wrote, “To Brad, My Hero” — Jerry Reed. Reed (aka ‘the Claw’) took Atkins’ style to another dimension in the 1960s, and Jones says, “I went crazy with Jerry’s stuff. I do a lot of his licks, but I do ‘em different.” The influence of left-handed brother Ron contributed: Ron played a right-handed guitar upside down, picking the bass notes with his fingers. “I just never learned to play right,” says Jones. “I double pick a whole lot on the bottom and get a kind of funky sound.” (Notice in the video that he sometimes cross picks up and down with his thumbpick as if it were a flat pick.)

Jones has three albums out on the Virginia-based Flat Five label, and in 1992 won the fingerstyle guitar competition at Winfield, Kansas. He has played in Europe in the company of such legends as Albert Lee, Larry Coryell, and Marcel Dadi, but Jones doesn’t lean on the guitar for his livelihood. “I move furniture,” he says. “I go on tour when I can, but I don’t take it all that serious. I tried that for awhile, but I got severely overweight, so I had to go back to work.”
Eisenhower was still President when a 20-year-old from Takoma Park, Maryland issued an LP of steel-string guitar solos, *Blind Joe Death*, on his own label, Takoma. “John kind of invented the audience for solo steel-string guitar,” Leo Kottke told Dale Miller, “and the industry behind it. Without John it wouldn’t have happened.” The seminal albums Fahey made for his Takoma label in the Sixties were a big part of both why and how it happened: “When I started,” Fahey once told this writer, “nobody was interested in guitar solos — in taking old blues pieces and trying to recreate them. I thought there was enough in the guitar that deserved concert attention. I was pushing to get the steel-string guitar recognized as a legitimate concert instrument, using American folk tradition, though not exclusively. I was eclectic, starting off with some blues and hillbilly pieces by adding classical licks, Indian stuff, and other music that is hard to define.”

Fahey’s pioneering eclecticism is demonstrated in the performances on this video. His lap-style slide playing is a vehicle for Bukka White’s *Poor Boy*, which John Lomax recorded by an
imprisoned Bukka White at Parchman Farm in 1939. (Fahey rediscovered White in 1964, and recorded him for the Takoma label.) The second clip of a younger Fahey shows him moving through introspective, and sometimes dissonant material in a manner which clearly anticipates the ‘impressionism’ of his varied disciples. And his syncopated arrangement of the Episcopalian hymn, *In Christ There Is No East Nor West*, became a fingerpickers’ standard, in the 1960s, comparable to “Windy and Warm” and “Angie” in popularity.

*Old Girlfriends And Other Horrible Memories (Varrick)*
*Old Girlfriends And Other Horrible Memories (Varrick)*
*I Remember Blind Joe Death (Varrick)*
*Rain Forests, Oceans And Other Themes (Varrick)*
*John Fahey Christmas Guitar (Varrick)*
*God, Time And Causality (Shanachie)*
*Railroad (Shanachie)*
*Fare Forward Voyagers (Shanachie)*
*Old Fashioned Love (Shanachie)*
*The Yellow Princess (Vanguard)*
*John Fahey & Elizabeth Cotten (Vestapol Video)*

Reed cites two of the other artists on this dvd — John Fahey and Jorma Kaukonen — as his formative influences as a guitarist. The acoustic funk tap attack illustrated in this video was inspired by the examples of Michael Hedges and Stanley Jordan, and gives new meaning to the term ‘hammer-on.’ “Creative exploration, for me, is the purpose of playing guitar,” Reed told Todd Ellison. “I always try to go after something I haven’t done
before.”

Reed’s eight albums trace his evolution through a variety of six-and-12-string fingerstyle techniques, including slide guitar. He devotes as much creative energy to generating new tunes as he does to new techniques. “For me,” says Reed, “composing is as important as playing the instrument.”

The Washington Post said of Preston’s playing: “His unaccompanied instrumentals often sounded like combo arrangements as he deftly combined bass lines, melody lines, arpeggios, piano-like tapping on the fretboard and conga-like rapping on the guitar's wooden box. Most impressively, the tunes never sounded like academic experiments but always emphasized a memorable melody and clear mood.”

- Border Towns (Capitol Nashville)
- Blue Vertigo (Capitol Nashville)
- The Road Less Traveled (Flying Fish)
- Preston Reed (Flying Fish)
- Instrument Landing (MCA Master Series)

**Woody Mann**

Mann’s performance here of crisply articulated orchestral jazz chords illustrates his imaginative blend of jazz, blues, and much else. His lifelong study of America’s musical heritage began in Rev. Gary Davis’s living room and extended to Julliard and his
current faculty position at Manhattan’s New School for Social Research — Guitar Study Center. Mann is best known for such instructional books as *Six Early Blues Guitarists* and *The Complete Robert Johnson*, but his performing credits have included stints with such blues legends as Bukka White and Son House, jazz guitarist Atilla Zoller, even work as guitarist in the Broadway production of *A Chorus Line*. “Blue” is certainly one of the primary colors in Mann’s varied palette, and recently he has made a series of blues-based instructional recordings for Stefan Grossman’s Guitar Workshop.

- *Fingerstyle Blues Guitar - DVD Lesson*
- *The Guitar Of Blind Blake - DVD Lesson*
- *The Guitar Of Big Bill Broonzy - DVD Lesson*
- *The Guitar Of Lonnie Johnson - Audio Lessons*
- *Roots Of Robert Johnson - Audio Lessons*
- *Masterpieces Of Country Blues Guitar - Audio Lessons*
- *Fingerpicking Jazz Improvisation - Audio Lessons*

(All the above available from Stefan Grossman’s Guitar Workshop)

**Will Ackerman**

Steeped in the music of John Fahey, Ackerman was able to hang up his carpenter’s tools and enjoy phenomenal success in the 1980s with the label he started in 1975, Windham Hill. The label and a genre of music became synonymous, and Ackerman (who has since gone on to other entrepreneurial ventures), became the guru/patron of a school of so-called New Age guitarists, including Ackerman’s cousin, Alex de Grassi and Michael Hedges. Wind-ham Hill’s brand of mood-enhancing fingerstyle guitar often made the Billboard pop charts and Ackerman’s independent entrepreneurial success had him touted in Esquire’s 1984 Register: The Best of the New
Generation as among the “men and women under 40 who are changing America.”

At the very least, Ackerman felt that he and his disciples were changing the expectations of listeners to fingerstyle guitar. “I personally feel that the range of human emotions that are being attempted and communicated now are more subtle and intimate and personal,” he told Dan Forte. “I think the purpose of the music almost changed. It went from something demonstrative to something articulate.”

*Past Light* (Windham Hill)
*Childhood and Memory* (Windham Hill)
*It Takes A Year* (Windham Hill)
*The Search for the Turtle's Navel* (Windham Hill)
*The Opening Of Doors* (Windham Hill)
*Conferring With The Moon* (Windham Hill)

*Notes by Mark Humphrey*
Sittin' On Top of the World
SOME SUMMER DAY

Standard Tuning: EADGBE

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Peter Finger
1. A Trip Through
   The Pyrenees
Bert Jansch
2. One For Jo
Adrian Legg
3. Cajun Interlude
Jorma Kaukonen
4. Man’s Fate
Buster B. Jones
5. Wild Turkey
John Fahey
6. Poor Boy
Preston Reed
7. Slap Funk
Woody Mann
8. Lennie’s Lament
Adrian Legg
9. Midwest Sunday
Buster B. Jones
10. Live At Five
John Fahey
11. Red Pony
Jorma Kaukonen
12. Hesitation Blues
Bert Jansch
13. Black Waterside
Will Ackerman
14. A Bricklayer’s
   Beautiful Daughter
John Fahey
15. In Christ There Is
   No East Or West
Bonus Instructional
Tracks:
Buster B. Jones
16. Sitting On Top
   Of The World
John Fahey
17. Some Summer Day

“This three DVD set features new and archival footage of performances by the preeminent names in steel-string fingerstyle guitar. Beginning with Peter Finger’s breathtaking ‘A Trip Through The Pyrenees’, the collection boasts some real gems: a rare late 1960s clip of Jorma Kaukonen and Jack Casady - a.k.a. Hot Tuna doing ‘Hesitation Blues’, Bert Jansch delivering a soulful version of ‘One For Jo’, John Fahey crooning while plucking a Gibson L-00 on a plaintive ‘Poor Boy’ and Adrian Legg at his peg-twisting best on ‘Midwest Sunday’... It’s a wonder seeing these greats do what they do up close without those often clumsy instructional asides, and without getting a lot of smoke in your face. A real treat.”

— Guitar Player

Vestapol 13006