Fingerstyle Guitar
New Dimensions & Explorations
Volume Three

Featuring
Steve Howe
Larry Coryell
Martin Taylor
Bob Brozman
Martin Carthy
Tim Sparks
Martin Simpson
Peppino D'Agostino
This third volume in a series of videos documenting the recent evolution of fingerstyle guitar presents a range of stylists who at times appear to have little more in common than the mantle of instrumentalists testing their talents and repertoires to the limit. What bridge exists between Larry Coryell’s avant-garde amble and Martin Carthy’s assay of a bagpipe tune? Only one of shared curiosity and courage, of test pilots determined to break personal stylistic sound barriers. Each of the nine artists here writes his musical signature with bold and unmistakably individual strokes. Musically diverse, the common thread among them is a commitment to pursuing a unique vision, one for which the ‘voice’ happens to be the guitar.

The renaissance of fingerstyle guitar over the past 30 years represents one of the most extraordinary ‘growth spurts’ in the instrument’s history. The roots of this renaissance lie in varied musical currents of the late 1950s and early 1960s, particularly ‘skiffle’ in England and the ‘urban folk boom’ in America, both of which excited an awareness of fingerstyle folk and blues traditions. Simultaneously, Segovia’s classical guitar tradition benefited from the infusion of then-young stars’ such as John

![Photo by John Hemmings](Gordon Giltrap & Martin Taylor)
Williams and Julian Bream who inspired a new generation of players. A few dedicated souls followed the flamenco guitar Muse back when bullfight posters and the cult of Hemingway were ubiquitous, while a cooler Latin groove, the samba, insinuated itself and sparked classical guitar sales when bossa nova struck our shores in 1962. Given the heady cross-current of influences in which a musically aware guitarist was swimming by the mid-1960s, the pastiche of blues, classical, and Eastern music influences which distinguished John Fahey’s late 1960s compositions seems less esoteric than inevitable. The raw materials, be they folk, classic, or foreign, were already on the table some 30 years ago. The process of assimilation and exploration has been ongoing ever since.

As recent evidence, we have here Martin Taylor’s harmonically sophisticated chordal jazz exposition of the plunky banjo anthem, Dixie, Tim Sparks’s musical postcards from Latin America and the Balkans, and Peppino D’Agostino’s Celtic-colored feints and jabs. These artists are from England, North Carolina, and Italy respectively, though there is nothing remotely ‘regional’ in their playing. Today all the world’s music is available to all the world’s players, and it is increasingly difficult to ‘tag’ a musician’s origin by any stylistic accent.

Five of the nine players here are English, though the blues, ragtime, and jazz elements in their playing belie their birthplace. England, of course, has a great tradition of fingerstyle virtuosi stretching back to the lutenist/composer John Dowland (1562-1626), memorably described by sonneteer Richard Barnfield as “Dowland...whose heavenly touch/Upon the lute doth ravish human sense.” But Dowland’s lute quickly lost ground in England to the Spanish guitar as the Seventeenth century progressed. The guitar became such a ubiquitous accoutrement of the amatory rake that playwright John Crowne could describe one character in his Sir Courtly Nice as “the general guitar o’ the town, inlay’d with every thing women fancy.”

The guitarists on this video are serious musicians playing at an extraordinary level of expressive skill. However, neither they nor we ought ever to lose sight of a simple fact known to guitarists since the days when the guitar was regarded as a mongrel nephew of the lute: whether for wooing or wailing, the instrument is accessible to players of varied skills and is purely a pleasure to play. Country guitar star Marty Stuart summed up the guitar’s timeless appeal in a Guitar Player in-
terview with Chris Gill: “Beyond making a living with a gui-
tar,” said Stuart, “the guitar makes you happy. To me it was
designed for happiness, sorrow, and emotion. There's something
about when you're lonely and pick up a guitar and make your-
self grin. All the loneliness disappears. It's a good way to meet
girls. I can't think of anything that a guitar can do wrong.”

Martin Taylor

How do you play a bass-guitar duet on a single instrument?
Martin Taylor ably demonstrates, evidencing a clear register
separation and crisp chordal sophistication inspired by his key-
board heroes, Bill Evans and Art Tatum. Taylor’s performances
here underscore the words of the Guitar International reviewer
who called him “a mind that loves the evocative beauty in a
good melody and can spread it out, shimmering, like no one
else.”

Taylor’s road to melodic mastery began in England where,
at age four, he started playing guitar. He reckons he turned pro
in 1964 at age eight—at least that’s when his playing earned
him a penny whistle from an appreciative music shop owner.
By age eleven Taylor had his first electric guitar, a Guild Starfire,
and was listening intently to the recordings of pianists Evans
and Tatum as well as guitarists Barney Kessel, Kenny Burrell, and Wes Montgomery. He left school when he was fifteen, and has earned his living with a guitar ever since.

Taylor's early experiences included two years on the cruise ship QE2 (he got to sit in with the Basie Band) and a stint strumming Dixieland alongside Acker Bilk. His long association with jazz violinist Stephane Grappelli began in 1979, and has yielded a number of albums. Along with Grappelli and such disparate bow masters as L. Subramaniam and Yehudi Menuhin, Taylor has also performed with such consummate jazz guitarists as Charlie Byrd, Barney Kessel and Joe Pass. Taylor's vigorous touring schedule has taken him to such far-flung ports as Sri Lanka and Ghana. His 1993 album, Artistry (Linn Records), was produced by Steve Howe and enjoyed several weeks at the top of Britain's jazz charts.

A Tribute To Art Tatum (Hep Records)
Don't Fret (Linn Records)
Change Of Heart (Linn Records)
Artistry (Linn Records)

Martin Simpson

Writers have tied themselves in knots of adjectival ecstasy describing Simpson's playing ("understated beauty...", "breathtaking musical clarity....", "tunes...like glistening jewels"). Simpson first inspired praise on the English folk club circuit, where he trailed in the wake of the seminal 1960s folk revival guitarists (Davey Graham, John Renbourn, Bert Jansch, Martin Carthy) and absorbed a fair measure of American blues and 'old-timey' music besides. He was sharing
bills with the likes of Richard Thompson and Steeleye Span while still in his teens, and made a quantum artistic leap in 1977 when he embarked on a decade-long venture as accompanist to singer's singer June Tabor.

Simpson's work with Tabor not only brought him greater attention but focused his attitude towards interpreting traditional songs. (He became hooked on them when he learned Barbara Allen at school in Scunthorpe at age seven.) “I started playing the guitar ‘cause I wanted to tell stories like Marty Robbins,” says Simpson. “I still feel I’m much more influenced by singers and songs than I am by guitar players.” And that’s how Simpson approaches his arrangements of traditional songs: “I don’t just learn the tunes,” he says, “I learn the songs...I know exactly what the lyrics are about. If I don’t, I don’t play.”

Since moving to America in 1988, Simpson has found ample opportunity to flaunt his blues chops as well, even performing at blues festivals and working in a band with pianist Henry Gray, onetime Howlin’ Wolf band member. “When the British became aware of black music,” says Simpson, who has played blues as long as he has ballads, “the effect was unbelievable.” His percussive right hand attack was inspired by Big Joe Williams, a Delta legend who liked Simpson well enough to have him autograph his walking stick. (For a sense of Williams's raw power, see the Vestapol video Legends of Country Blues Guitar, Volume Two) Simpson is the author of The Acoustic Guitar of Martin Simpson (Accent on Music, Palo Alto, 1993).  

Leaves Of Life (Shanachie)  
When I Was On Horseback (Shanachie)  
The Collection (Shanachie)  
A Closer Walk With Thee (Gourd Records)  
Red Roses with Jessica Simpson (Rhiannon Records)  
Video Guitar Lesson: Acoustic Guitar Instrumentals /Arrangements In Alternate Tunings (Homespun Tapes)  

Bob Brozman  
No player is more closely identified with his instrument (or instruments) than Bob Brozman, who has spearheaded the revived interest in the National guitar. The Brooklyn-born Brozman came to the instrument via his discovery of such National-brandishing bluesmen as Son House and Bukka White (House praised the metal-bodied guitar’s utility as both shield and weapon in barroom brawls). “I was into blues so heavily that I was buying every album with a picture of a National on
it," says Brozman, who found one such album offering not only blues but also the Hawaiian music of Sol Hoopii. The discovery of Hoopii's astonishing technique prompted Brozman to collect vintage Hawaiian 78s and replicate their sounds on his ever-expanding collection of vintage National guitars.

In the 1970s, Brozman was also honing his performing skills as a street busker in Santa Cruz: "I learned yodeling, scat-singing, and growling on the street," says Brozman, who adds that the projection (and visual appeal) of National guitars helped stimulate tips. By the early 1980s, Brozman had moved off the streets and on to such coveted (albeit challenging) gigs as opening for the Grateful Dead and Bonnie Raitt. He has recorded and toured (especially in Europe) extensively since, authored the definitive history of vintage Nationals and worked as consultant with the new National company in the development of their Tricone guitars. Brozman's performances here demonstrate both the 'vocal range' of Nationals and Brozman's range of influences, blues, Hawaiian, and Latin sounds all mingled in flamboyantly Brozmanian fashion. "I'm trying to draw out the elements common to the genres I work in," says Brozman, "and combine them in ways that maybe weren't tried before."

A Truckload Of Blues (Rounder Records)
Devil's Slide (Rounder Records)
Hello Central, Give Me Dr. Jazz (Rounder Records)
Blue Hula Stomp (Kicking Mule Records)
Snapping The Strings (Kicking Mule Records)
Video Guitar Lesson:
Bottleneck Blues Guitar (Homespun Tapes)
Traditional Hawaiian Guitar (Homespun Tapes)
Hot Guitar Techniques From Folk To Jazz
Volumes 1 & 2 (Homespun Tapes)
Martin Simpson & Bob Brozman

How did this (on paper at least) unlikely duo form? They met at the '93 NAMM (National Association of Music Merchandisers) Show in Los Angeles, testing and demonstrating instruments at the National guitar company display area. “It was a seemingly telepathic relationship from the start,” says Brozman, who confesses to a “prejudice against...Celtic stuff” prior to meeting Simpson. Common ground, however, was provided by the blues. “What makes it work,” says Simpson, “is that Bob and I are very well grounded in traditional forms...We have a similar vocabulary of music and it works wonderfully.” Eloquent evidence is provided by the elegiac Tricone blues duet here, and a Brozman/Simpson album is in the works.

Larry Coryell

‘Fusion’ was the label attached to the adventuresome blend of jazz and rock pioneered by Larry Coryell (and a handful of others) in the late 1960s-early 1970s. Coryell’s formidable attack gained attention in groups with drummer Chico Hamilton and vibraphonist Gary Burton in which he played electric guitar, but his performance in this video shows him every bit as commanding in a solo acoustic context.

If the recordings of Wes Montgomery and Barney Kessel hadn’t drawn him to guitar, Coryell might have become the only known fusion ukulele virtuoso, since the uke was his first fret
ted stringed instrument. He started on piano at age four (both his parents played), but answered the siren call of the uke a few years later. Thankfully, Wes Montgomery showed him where he wanted to go next: “As a teenager,” Coryell told Michael Brooks in a Guitar Player interview, “I would listen to Wes Montgomery and just not have any idea how he did it...how his mind worked to get those ideas.” Coryell’s own ideas were fast forming, and by the late 1960s the jazz journal Downbeat hailed him as “perhaps the most original guitarist around.”

Coryell teamed with a like-minded guitar visionary, John McLaughlin, for 1970’s influential Spaces album and worked extensively with his group, The Eleventh House, in the early 1970s. His 1984 Flying Fish label album, Just Like Being Born, was comprised of acoustic guitar duets with Brian Keane. The eclectic Coryell has played rock festivals and transcribed Stravinsky’s ballets for guitar. His Nipon/Phonogram recording of Gershwin and Ravel pieces, Visions in Blue, made the Japanese Top 10. “My calling on this planet is to be a searcher,” says Coryell, whose blend of finger-and-flatpick-style in a performance indebted to twentieth century art music demonstrates him answering his calling.

The Dragon Gate (Shanachie)  
Twelve Frets to One Octave (Shanachie)  
Visions in Blue (NEC Avenue)  
Tributaries (BMG Records)
Best known for his ‘progressive rock’ fingerations with the bands Yes and Asia, Howe here evinces fond affection for Travis-influenced ragtime country picking. “There isn’t very much music that you can’t play on one guitar,” Howe contends. “It doesn’t restrict you. In fact, it allows you to play kinds of music that you couldn’t do with a group.”

The London-born Howe picked up guitar at age twelve (circa 1959). “The guitar playing itself came out of a real need,” Howe told Guitar Player’s Dan Hedges. “Music was starting to fill my mind, and the guitar became part of a whole fantasy.” He took up the instrument in the wake of England’s skiffle boom, and listened hard to Chuck Berry, Chet Atkins, and Big Bill Broonzy.

By his teens, Howe was working the ‘swinging London’ club circuit of the mid-1960s, where he enjoyed some success with the band Tomorrow and a modest English hit, My White Bicycle. But it wasn’t until he joined Yes in 1970 that Howe’s passion for guitar paid off.

Variously praised (and damned) as ‘art rock’ or ‘classical rock,’ Yes was a tremendously successful venture for which Howe co-wrote many songs with vocalist Jon Anderson, including Roundabout. Howe’s guitar collection was a notable presence at Yes concert spectacles: he sometimes had eleven instruments onstage! The band’s high profile led to Howe cutting a pair of 1970s solo albums for Atlantic and to his being named
‘Best Overall Guitarist’ in Guitar Player’s 1977 Readership Poll.

Since the glory days of Yes, Howe has been consistently involved with such groups as Asia and GTR with ex-Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett. He has also pursued solo recording and performance, both acoustic and electric. “Most of the germs of what I play were written on acoustic guitar,” says Howe, whose formidable instrumental arsenal may be admired in The Steve Howe Guitar Collection (Miller Freeman, San Francisco, 1993).

- Turbulence (Relativity)
- The Grand Scheme Of Things (Relativity)
- Steve Howe Album (Atlantic Records)
- Beginnings (Atlantic Records)
- with GTR (Arista)
- with Asia (Geffen Records)
- with Yes: The Yes Album (Atlantic Records)

**Martin Carthy**

The premier singer/guitarist of Britain’s folk revival was inspired to take up the guitar by Big Bill Broonzy and has quipped: “Basically, what I do is Travis-picking trodden upon to make it work for English music.” But there’s little mistaking Carthy’s oblique yet commanding attack on his lovably battered Martin 000-18 for any American antecedent. His triumph has been creating a style which is uniquely personal and singularly right for traditional English music.

Carthy has been a mainstay of the English folk scene since the early 1960s, when he influenced such visitors as Bob Dylan (Lord Franklin came from Carthy) and Paul Simon (Scarborough Fair). His punchy, angular playing and penchant for ballads full of murder, myth, and magic made him a sensation, and resulted in several classic albums for the Fontana label in the 1960s. He was then developing his unique guitar tuning (taught on Martin Carthy: British Fingerstyle Guitar GW 927) and performing as a duo with fiddler Dave Swarbrick, seen here in the clip of
the 9/8 meter romp, Byker Hill. ("I love the idea of shifting the accents of a tune," says Carthy.)

The 1970s found Carthy occasionally awash in the folk-rock stew brewed by bass-playing enfant terrible Ashley Hutchings (Steeleye Span and Albion Country Band), sometimes solo as singer-guitarist and others a cappella in the cupped ear quartet the Watersons. The Nineties find Carthy again teamed on occasion with fiddler Swarbrick, and their odd-meter high wire acts are today even more daring than those of their callow youths. Widely acclaimed as one of the most distinctive acoustic guitarists alive (Musician magazine once ranked him among the 'Hundred Greatest Guitarists of All Time'), Carthy modestly downplays his achievement as an instrumentalist and says, "Your business is to transmit the song."

The Collection (Green Linnet)
Life And Limb with Dave Swarbrick (Green Linnet)
Martin Carthy (Topic Records)
Byker Hill (Topic Records)
Right Of Passage (Topic Records)

**Peppino D’Agostino**

Messina, Italy was the birthplace of Peppino D’Agostino, who has since taken in much of the world’s music to become, according to San Francisco Examiner critic Phillip Elwood, “a poet on acoustic guitar, handling the instrument as if it were a dance partner...” D’Agostino took his first steps with guitar at age 11 and was moving smoothly enough by age 18 to be performing across Italy. He began writing original material at
that time for the instrument, incorporating influences from Europe, Brazil, and America. His debut album, a collaborations with Enzo Ponzio and Alfredo Morabito called Bluerba, appeared when D'Agostino was 25.

1983's Silk and Steel presented D'Agostino in the company of Duck Baker as well as several noted Italian guitarists, among them Giovanni Unteberger. D'Agostino's mastery of varied 'attacks' and repertoires came in handy that year when Berben-Italy had him write a bluegrass and country guitar flat-picking instructional book.

In the decade since, D'Agostino's reputation has gone international and he has expatriated to America's West Coast. He has recently shared stages with the likes of Doc Watson, Leo Kottke, Chet Atkins, John Lee Hooker, and Michael Hedges (one reviewer has called D'Agostino "Italy's answer to Michael Hedges"). In addition to performing, D'Agostino has been a featured instructor at numerous guitar workshops. He whimsically calls his style "minestrone music," and his virtuosic 'tapping technique' display here explains why California Magazine reviewer Derk Richardson wrote: "D'Agostino manages to create dazzling patterns of sound from a single guitar."

Sparks (Shanachie)
Acoustic Spirit (Shanachie)
Close To The Heart (Mesa/Blue Moon)
Silk And Steel (Lizard Records)
Bluerba (Drums)

**Tim Sparks**

North Carolina-born Sparks was encouraged to take up guitar by a grandmother who played both piano and guitar in an Appalachian gospel quartet. Sparks later expanded his guitaristic horizons under the tutelage of Segovia protegee Jesus Silva at the North Carolina School of the Arts. For more than a decade, Sparks has been a presence in the thriving Minneapolis/St. Paul acoustic music scene. His arrangement of Carla Bley's composition, Jesus Maria, has been recorded by the most famous fleet-fingered Minnesotan, Leo Kottke, who appears in the video *Fingerstyle Guitar: New Dimensions & Explorations Volume 1* (Vestapol 13006). Following the example of two other stellar players from the region, Chris Proctor and Pat Donohue (both seen in *Fingerstyle Guitar: New Dimensions & Explorations Volume 2*, Vestapol 13007), Sparks triumphally carried 1993's National Fingerpicking Championship trophy back to Minne
apolis from Winfield, Kansas after performing excerpts of his arrangement of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite.

Sparks' interest in a wide range of music is evident in a resume that includes performances in jazz ensembles, Greek bands, and a Persian music ensemble, Robayat, in which he plays the oud. Certainly his interest in both Latin American and Balkan/Middle Eastern music is apparent in his performances on this video, with Sparks playing an alto guitar (Mexican requinto) tuned a fourth higher than standard. Sparks credits his study of the music of Paraguayan composer Augustin Barrios with his initial explorations of the nylon string classical guitar. Duck Baker suggested Sparks tune the top string of his alto guitar to a G# instead of an A, which added, says Sparks, "a lot in warmth and playability." His fascination with the music of the Balkans was inspired "while traveling with my wife Chryll through Hungary and Yugoslavia about five years ago," Sparks recalls. "When we got back to the States, I started picking things off records that I thought would lay nicely on the guitar." The result, entitled Balkan Dreams Suite, was praised by Guitar Player editor Joe Gore as "an exhilarating, odd-meter minefield from a gifted composer, arranger, and performer."

The Nutcracker Suite (Acoustic Music Records)
Tab/Music book: The Nutcracker Suite
(available from Guitar Solo Productions, 1411 Clement Street, San Francisco, CA 94118)
Gordon Giltrap

London-native Giltrap got his first guitar at age twelve in 1960, and had his own band going just two years later. Like his duo partner in this video, Martin Taylor, Giltrap left school at fifteen to follow his Muse. Unlike the jazz-oriented Taylor, Giltrap was fascinated by the ‘folk-blues’ scene which revolved around the likes of John Renbourn and Bert Jansch, who deeply influenced his stylistic direction. Giltrap was recording for the Transatlantic label by the time he was eighteen, and such works as his Visionary album, inspired by the works of poet William Blake, prompted him to be tagged the English folk world’s “brightest hope of ’77" in some quarters.

Giltrap’s solo career has been augmented by extensive composing for British television (The Holiday Programme, Close Relations, Working Titles) and orchestral commissions which have been performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Kreisler String Orchestra. Nearer his London folk pub roots, Giltrap has also worked in the past decade with Bert Jansch, John Renbourn, and Fairport Convention fiddler Ric Sanders. Giltrap met Martin Taylor while touring with Sanders in 1989, and they teamed in 1991 for the critically acclaimed A Matter Of Time album. To date Giltrap has recorded 24 albums and joins the roster of guitar collector/authors featured in this video with The Hofner Guitar— A History (IMP, 1993), co-written with Neville Marten of Music Maker Publications.

The Best Of Gordon Giltrap (Prestige Records)
Visionary (Prestige Records)
Gordon Giltrap/Guitarist (Music Maker Records)
A Matter Of Time with Martin Taylor (Prestige Records)
Perilous Journey (Prestige Records)
Fear Of The Dark (Prestige Records)
Elegy (Prestige Records)
Just Squeeze Me

Freely

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Dma7   Em7   F♯m7   Em7

Dma7   Gma9(#11)   F♯m7   Bm7
Em⁹ | Em¹¹
---|---
F#m⁷ | Bm⁷
Em⁹ | A¹³
Dma⁹/A | G/A
A | G/A
Dma⁹/A | Gma⁶⁹/A¹³ | F#m⁷ | Bm⁷
Old Tom of Oxford

Tuning: CGCDGA

Play: AA/BB/C/BB/A
This third volume in a series of DVDs presenting the recent evolution of fingerstyle guitar presents a range of stylists who at times appear to have little more in common than the mantle of instrumentalists testing their talents and repertoires to the limit. What bridge exists between Larry Coryell's avant-garde amble and Martin Carthy's assay of a bagpipe tune? Only one of shared curiosity and courage, of test pilots determined to break personal stylistic sound barriers. Each of the nine artists here writes his musical signature with bold and unmistakably individual strokes. Musically diverse, the common thread among them is a commitment to pursuing a unique vision, one for which the ‘voice’ happens to be the guitar.