Stefan Grossman
A Retrospective
1971-1995
In a sense, we have his father’s aversion to the saxophone to thank for Stefan Grossman’s lifelong engagement with the acoustic guitar. It entered his life as his brother Karl, three years Stefan’s senior, took up the saxophone. After a few squawk-filled weeks, Herbert Grossman wasn’t happy. “He would have him practice in the closet because it was too loud,” Stefan recalls. Like all kid brothers, Stefan wanted to imitate Karl, but wasn’t keen on practicing in a closet. A quieter instrument – a guitar, for instance – would be less grating on paternal nerves. “My father got a guitar from a Goodwill Shop,” Stefan recalls, “an old Epiphone.” The year was 1954. Stefan Grossman was nine.

Forty-two years later, Stefan’s name has become synonymous with most aspects of the acoustic guitar experience. He’s a performer in varied styles who has always been passionately engaged in teaching. In the thirty years since his How to Play Blues Guitar appeared on vinyl, Stefan has used all available media—books, cassettes, Lps, CDs, videos—in disseminating information to guitarists of all levels. “That’s what life is all about,” he says, “getting information.” Along with playing and teaching, he has been active in recording and championing a host of gifted guitarists worldwide. And his role as archivist of phenomenal filmed and videotaped guitar performances is evident in his Vestapol Video series.

Stefan Grossman
A Retrospective 1971-1995
and Stefan Grossman's Guitar Workshop. Stefan’s tireless engagement with a range of guitar-related enterprises and explorations has taken him a long way from the Brooklyn Goodwill shop which supplied his first instrument. And the world of guitar lovers is a far richer place for his father’s aversion to saxophones.

Stefan was born April 16, 1945 to Herbert and Ruth Grossman. (He and a sax-playing cousin, Steve Grossman, who once worked with Miles Davis and Elvin Jones, were both named for the same grandmother, Stephanie.) He was born in Brooklyn but raised in Queens, New York in an environment he describes as “middle-middle-class” in a family which valued education and the arts. For a brief time, he tried to accompany Karl playing what he calls “1940s oldies but goodies.” But he soon chafed at the songs of his parents’ era and the formality of reading pop chestnuts from staff notation. “I was learning proper music notation from books,” he recalls, “which is rather dry. To a kid of 10 or 11, learning how to play ‘Autumn Leaves’ doesn’t mean anything.”

Playing three-walled handball, however, was another matter entirely. For nearly four years, Stefan neglected the guitar while attending the all-male Brooklyn Technical High School. Then, as he turned 15, the guitar once more raised its voice. “I started to play guitar again,” Stefan recalls, “first because it was the thing for a social event – you’d go to a party and play a guitar and meet girls – and, second, because I really liked the guitar.” It was during this time Stefan happened onto the Washington Square Park ‘hoots’ which were in full cry in 1960. They provided Stefan his initial connection with the burgeoning folk revival. At the same time, his curiosity about the music’s sources was piqued. “I’d got some old-time country records as well as recordings by Woody Guthrie and Big Bill Broonzy on the suggestion of my brother,” he recalls. “My parents thought the old-time music was very strange. They said it had been heavily sponsored in the 1920s and 1930s by Henry Ford, meaning that it was very right-wing music, and my parents were very leftist. The Woody Guthrie and Big Bill Broonzy music were politically alright for them. The politics meant nothing whatever to me but the music really moved me.” Stefan’s preference was for Broonzy’s recordings. “I liked the sound of instruments,” he says. “I was struck by Broonzy’s rhythmic, driving, phenomenal guitar. It
was always the black musicians that interested me most.” And the one who had the most profound impact on him was about to enter his life.

“I started going out with some girls from Brooklyn College,” Stefan recalls, “and one of their friends, Bob Fox, said, ‘You should go see the Rev. Gary Davis,’ and I didn’t even know who Rev. Gary Davis was – I had no idea. That same week I went to the Folklore Center on Bleecker Street and Jack Prelutsky was there playing a tune, ‘I Belong to the Band.’ I said, ‘What’s that?’ He said, ‘That’s a Gary Davis piece.’ I said, ‘Oh,’ and things clicked. Someone had just told me to see Gary Davis and there was this piece I liked.”

Stefan got Davis’s address on Park Avenue in the Bronx and casually informed his parents he was going there for lessons. “My father was really scared because of this little white kid, this white Jewish kid afoot in the worst crime area in the whole of America,” Stefan recalls. “My Dad drove me there for that first lesson on the pretense that he wanted to buy shoes at a shop nearby! Once you got to the address you had to go down an alleyway to a little tenement shack at the back which was Rev. Davis’s home. You could see rats dancing in the shadows. I knocked on the door and this man opened up and said, ‘You bring your money, honey?’ One eye was totally missing and the other was bulbous with a cataract. He didn’t have his glasses on, he just had his long johns on.”
Despite this off-putting introduction, Stefan remembers feeling “totally charmed” by Rev. Davis. “I mean, he was an incredible genius as a teacher,” he says. “He was great if you were a good student. Musically, we really hit it. Emotionally, I’d never had met my grandfathers as they died before I was born and Rev. Davis very much substituted for them. I went out there every Saturday, also every Friday, Sunday, and every school holiday that I could. I’d stay up there for 12 hours at a time. Rev. Davis was a patient, exacting teacher. He would go over everything and help you with the accenting, the notes and variations. Man, he was always practicing! He always said he wanted to keep one or two steps ahead of his students, and he always did.”

While learning all he could of Davis’s vast repertoire of secular and sacred tunes, Stefan continued to hang out where he had first heard a Davis tune, the Folklore Center, warmly remembered as “a place where you could always get together and pick. You’d go down there and see Bob Dylan and Doc Watson just sitting and casually playing music. It was a great atmosphere to get started in music.” Then, too, there was Washington Square, where, Stefan recalls, “Everything was happening on Saturdays. After the park closed, you’d go to one of the kid’s houses in Brooklyn to pick. You’d meet people, some of them bluegrass people, some blues and ragtime people...we got to be friends and would play.” With his friends Steve Katz and Eric Kaz, Stefan played blues as the short-lived Gramercy Park Sheiks. He continued his tutelage from Rev. Davis, who, by 1962 had upgraded his digs with a color TV (won in a church raffle) and a ‘No Smoking’ sign visible through the omnipresent White Owl cigar haze. Stefan
was also absorbing more vintage roots music via 78 collectors. “They were very hip to turn you on to music,” says Stefan. “It would take six months, but they would gently lead you from the Memphis Jug Band to Charley Patton.” The infectiously funky jug band sound was naturally appealing to the Washington Square ‘hoot’ crowd. 1963 was the year in which the Rooftop Singers scored a number one hit with an update of Cannon’s Jug Stompers 1929 waxing, “Walk Right In.” Stefan’s stab at jug band stardom came as an organizer of the Even Dozen Jug Band, a loose ensemble which at times had as many as fourteen members, among them John Sebastian (“an incredible harmonica player,” says Stefan), Steve Katz, Peter Siegel, David Grisman, Joshua Rifkin, and Maria Muldaur. A scaled-down incarnation of the group made one album (Even Dozen Jug Band, Elektra EKS 724, 1964), but wrangling over its direction, coupled with college schedules, made it a short-lived burst of youthful energy.

During this time Stefan was attending Cooper Union Architectural School, though his aims weren’t entirely academic. “I was going to school basically to get meet girls,” he recalls, “and to stay out of the draft, like thousands of other people.” While achieving those goals, Stefan witnessed the astonishing appearance of blues rediscoveries — Mississippi John Hurt, Son House, Skip James, Bukka White — men known from rare 78s seemingly rescued from a time warp. He learned from them all and kept company with like-minded
contemporaries, both in New York and Washington, D.C., where he acquired his ‘Kid Future’ nickname (from being able to play Willie Brown’s arrangement of ‘Future Blues’). Later in California, he encountered John Fahey, Ry Cooder and Steve Mann. “If you could play guitar,” says Stefan, “you were accepted anywhere. I found that out. The first time I went to California and met all the good pickers there, I started playing the classic rags and fiddle tunes with counterpoint. As soon as they heard those arrangements I would have a place to sleep that night.”

In 1965, Stefan and former girlfriend Rory Block (aka Sunshine Kate) delivered How to Play Blues Guitar to Elektra. Along with the music, Stefan supplied tablature and notes about blues musicians for the booklet. This pioneering instructional recording led to an acoustic band venture on the West Coast with Janis Joplin, Taj Mahal, and Steve Mann which, due to contractual conflicts, never got beyond the rehearsal stage. Back in New York, Stefan spent a miserable four months (September-December 1966) playing electric guitar with the legendary shock-rock band, the Fugs. (Stefan got the gig when head Fug Ed Sanders asked, “Are you crazy?” and he replied in the affirmative). Early in 1967, Stefan found more convivial company playing in the rock group Chicago Loop. Mike Bloomfield and Barry Goldberg were good friends of the group and after four months, they told him: “You’re a fantastic and unique acoustic guitar player and you should stick to that.” Jobless, Stefan said to
himself: “I’ve been kicked out of school; I’m out of the draft. (With some difficulty, he got a 4F deferment). I’m going to Europe.” Before leaving, Stefan finished three books for Oak Publications, Country Blues Guitar, Delta Blues Guitar and Contemporary Ragtime Guitar. With detailed tablature, lyrics, and commentary on the musicians, these books were landmarks in their field. “Grossman’s books were unique,” wrote Dale Miller nearly three decades later. “The concepts and scope of his vision were much more ambitious than other one-shot method books, and his tablature, though idiosyncratic, was extremely accurate. In addition, he explained how to capture the tone of the original work, advising that to play a Gary Davis tune one should wear a thumbpick and fingerpicks on two fingers just like Davis, to play a Mississippi John Hurt tune one should use the bare thumb and two bare fingers just like Hurt...and so on.”

In June 1967, Stefan arrived in England with a list of contacts provided by his friend, Marc Silber. “Just after I got to London I went up to the Cambridge Folk Festival and I faced a big dilemma whether to enter a folk contest as an amateur or not,” Stefan recalls. “I was an amateur but they said I was too good an amateur. I met the High Level Ranters at the festival and I went up to Northumberland and I hung
out there. One of the big shocks of coming to England is that everyone sings a lot, and it doesn’t make any difference, good voice or bad voice. So I did start to sing, and I went through a phase of writing songs because everyone else was going through it, and then suddenly I found myself in what I do best, which is to play the guitar with the occasional song. But I play the guitar best, whether it’s my own or other people’s compositions.”

Stefan found a ‘parallel universe’ of sorts to the American folk revival thriving in England. “The Young Tradition were friends of Marc Silber,” Stefan recalls, “and they were living in the same house as John Renbourn and Bert Jansch. They were really open-armed. I arrived when there was a real vacuum and people were thirsty for a new sound and I had it....I just had this capacity to be able to play all these fancy ragtime tunes and other stuff – Mance Lipscomb, Skip James, Fred McDowell, Rev. Davis, Son House – you name it, every black musician, I could play their styles to a T because I’d study it like a college professor and could play it...”

Folk Roots editor Ian Anderson remembers Stefan’s arrival on the British folk scene as akin to that of an aggressive Yank storming a beachhead: “He didn’t, to be blunt, set out in entirely the best fashion, “Anderson writes, “trumpeting his arrival here with a Melody Maker interview which, basically, said that whilst these British guitar chappies of the Jansch/Renbourn ilk were jolly talented, they couldn’t play ‘real’ blues. Thus he had come here to show us a trick or two.” Show `em Stefan did, and his performances on the British folk club circuit led to a recording contract with Fontana, then one of Britain’s leading folk labels. His debut album, Aunt Molly Murray’s Farm, rated a `record of the month’ kudo from Melody Maker in 1969, and his follow-up, Gramercy Park Sheik, appeared later the same year. The success of these recordings cemented Stefan’s expatriate status and made him a unique fixture of the British and European folk scene. Robin Denselow, writing in The Electric Muse: The Story of Folk into Rock, writes that Stefan “carried out the ideals and promise of the folk blues revival with greater success than anyone else...What Stefan achieved with the blues is a musical ideal that other folk musicians, working in different fields, might have followed if they’d had the skill or the imagination...He’s written everything from children’s songs to bleak, surreal ballads, and a whole variety of instrumen-
tal. He moves from the traditional to the experimental, and back again, in a way that British traditionalists, with only one or two exceptions, find quite unthinkable.” While absorbing traces of a British musical accent via contact with Jansch, Renbourn, and Eric Clapton (who he had toured with while playing with the Chicago Loop), whom he credits with teaching him the vibrato technique, Stefan found himself sought after by Paul Simon. “I didn’t even know who Paul Simon was,” he recalls, “though of course I’d heard Simon and Garfunkel – this was 1969, and they were at their peak. Anyway, Paul was about to leave Art and was thinking about forming a band. He got in touch with me in October, and in December I met him in New York – he was staying in a house which belonged to Segovia’s former mistress. Paul gave up on the band idea, but over the next year we recorded four times together. ‘Paranoa Blues’ appears on his first solo album with me playing slide guitar.”

Ever restless, Stefan moved to Rome in 1969, continuing to tour not only the Great Britain but the rest of Europe as well. Stefan’s impact on European guitarists in the late 1960s was prodigious: “To this day the woods of Europe are full of Stefan’s heirs,” says Dave Van Ronk. But Stefan’s love for instruction and the ‘cause’ of exceptional acoustic guitarists was about to lead him to forums beyond concert halls and folk clubs.
In the early 1970s, responding to many requests, Stefan’s parents began marketing a series of their son’s audio instruction tapes in the U.S. This was the onset of Stefan Grossman’s Guitar Workshop. At the same time, Stefan was seeking American distribution of his Transatlantic label albums. “Transatlantic was never able to get a deal for me in America,” Stefan recalls. “I was really frustrated because I’m an American and I knew my records could sell here.” Stefan contacted his collector friend Nick Perls, who reissued the Yazoo blues series, but Perls wasn’t interested. John Fahey at Takoma didn’t even reply to Stefan’s query. Finally, ED Denson, Fahey’s Takoma label cofounder, expressed an interest in Stefan’s work and they jointly founded the Kicking Mule label, Denson manning the American operation and Stefan holding forth in Europe. “All during the years my instructional books had kept going,” Stefan recalls. “My parents had run that operation and had amassed a large mailing list and that was the first 3000 names that we used for Kicking Mule. So there was a lot of mailorder and we started to sell in stores and we started to have some success.”

Though Kicking Mule’s initial raison d’être was American distribution of an ambitious expatriate’s recordings, it quickly became a haven for a wide range of talented guitarists who might otherwise have gone unrecorded. (Not all Kicking Mule acts were guitarists — Stefan vows the label’s finest album and the first released was by banjoist Art Rosenbaum.)

For Stefan, his isolation in Italy was a further catalyst for producing records of other guitarists: “I would go to the record store in Rome and there was no record there that I could learn from,” he says. For a man to whom “getting information is what life’s all about,” this was untenable. If the records weren’t there, Stefan would set about producing them.

Thus began a decade of recordings with a dual musical-instructional focus. While anyone could enjoy the music, the Kicking Mule LP packages included booklets with tablature from which aspiring guitarists could glean knowledge and attempt to replicate the recording. The Kicking Mule stable of artists included several exponents of guitar adaptations of ‘classic’ piano rags (Dave Laibman, Ton Van Bergeyk), Celtic revivalists (Dave Evans), leading lights of British folk guitar (John Renbourn, Bert Jansch, Davey Graham), and artists who adroitly wandered the stylistic map (Duck Baker, Peter
Finger and Leo Wijnkamp Jr.). The guitarists were an international cast – English, American, Dutch, German, Welsh – who evinced individuality while sharing a common love of the acoustic guitar, usually steel strung and played solo. “Stefan was the focal point for bringing together a whole lot of musicians – guitar players primarily – and giving them a chance to interact with each other,” says Duck Baker.

Extensive interaction took place on the Kicking Mule tours Stefan organized for his label’s acts. It was an exciting time, says Stefan, of “cross-fertilization. We all learned from each other...” European wunderkinds like Leo Wijnkamp Jr. and veterans like Dave Van Ronk could be seen and heard together picking guitar rags in a way which bespoke a continuity of tradition.

Like almost every renaissance, that of the fingerstyle guitar celebrated by Kicking Mule was short-lived. By 1983, Stefan and Denson were undergoing a “friendly divorce” effectively dissolving Kicking Mule as a haven for acoustic guitarists. “We’re very good friends still,” says Stefan, “but ED got involved in doing other types of music, not guitar music, which did not interest me at all....” In the late 1970s, Stefan toured and recorded extensively with John Renbourn, with whom he had first recorded in 1976 for Kicking Mule. New York Times reviewer Stephen Holden praised their “exceptional rapport...matched by their understated virtuosity.” Of his duets with Renbourn, Stefan said simply, “It works well because we’re friends, and because we really work on it.”

By the mid-1980s, Stefan had been working on the road...
for nearly two decades and was weary. Sidelined by a herniated disc, Stefan, based again in Rome, Italy, took stock of his life and decided it was time to come home especially as Shanachie Records had made him an offer he couldn’t refuse. He had been back frequently to perform, but he returned to live in the States in 1987, 20 years since departing at age 22.

His work at Shanachie Records involved CD reissues of the Yazoo catalogue, Shanachie’s acclaimed Guitar Artistry series, which incorporated some Kicking Mule material, and the vintage performance videos which were precursors of Stefan’s current Vestapol Video line. “When I hear him describe the lengths he has to go to get this stuff,” Duck Baker once remarked of Stefan’s film footage sleuthing, “I realize that if anybody else but Stefan was doing it, it just wouldn’t happen.”

After five years at Shanachie, Stefan left to devote himself full-time to the varied enterprises presently occurring under the umbrella of Stefan Grossman’s Guitar Workshop. These include production of learning materials in all media – print, audio, and video. Aside from instructional books, cassettes and videos by Stefan and a host of other fine guitarists, there are the acclaimed Vestapol Videos of vintage and contemporary blues, jazz, folk, and country guitar performances. All this activity leaves Stefan precious little time for performances, though he professes not to miss them. He still does the occasional gig and recording (Pepsi called him for a commercial last year), but Stefan, the product of what he calls
“a typical Jewish family, believing that the mind is very sacred and very holy,” believes what he’s doing through his Workshop is of far greater importance. Besides, he had two decades of performing under his belt before the latest phase of his career began. Now Stefan’s doing for other guitarists what Rev. Gary Davis did for him, only one needn’t brave a Bronx tenement for his instruction. Nothing more formidable than a VCR is required.

Thirty years have passed since How to Play Blues Guitar pointed the way towards a lifetime of passionate involvement with the preservation and perpetuation of guitar music, to paraphrase Malcom X, “by any means necessary.” Those who know Stefan unanimously vouch for his tenacity and intensity, qualities which have served him well in his single-minded pursuit of sounds as exciting as those emitted by Big Bill Broonzy’s “rhythmic, driving, phenomenal guitar,” a sound he first encountered when Eisenhower was President and Stefan’s English counterparts were banging away in skiffle bands. The world has much changed since then, but one suspects Stefan’s drive to get at the sounds he wants and share them with the like-minded has not. It’s a rare knack, but then some guys will go to extraordinary lengths to avoid being locked in a closet with a saxophone.

Stefan, Bert Jansch & Ralph McTell, Denmark, 1979
The Performances

This retrospective of Stefan’s career begins with two performances from Denmark in 1971. “Roll & Tumble Blues” is the archetypal Delta bottleneck blues first recorded by Hambone Willie Newbern in 1929. Robert Johnson revamped it in 1936 as “If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day,” and in 1950 “Rollin’ and Tumblin’ Pt. 1 & 2” became Muddy Waters’ final release on the Aristocrat label prior to its rechristening as Chess. Stefan’s performance of this Spanish tuning (open G) showpiece with a jagged bottleneck suggests his direct approach to the sometimes arcane business of wresting the necks from wine bottles. For him, a solid whack at a curbside with an empty gave him what he wanted. “I remember in Denver I was almost arrested one night in the back alley of the Folklore Center breaking bottles,” he recalls, “and I couldn’t explain to the policeman that what I was doing was a valid exercise!”

“High Society” is an archetype of another sort. Based on Snooks Eaglin’s Folkways recording, this spritely guitar showpiece likely dates to the turn of the century, when guitars were just becoming widely popular folk instruments and piano ragtime was still in vogue. Just as a ragtime pianist might imitate the sundry sections of a band, a guitarist, setting out from the favorite ragtime key, C, might readily recreate a pianistic imitation of the brass bands which were then a fixture of American public life and thus enjoyed by society both high and low.

The next five performances occurred in Sweden in 1972. “Shake Sugaree” comes from the repertoire of Elizabeth Cotten. Cotten’s music came from a time and place when blues was emerging but ragtime was still prevalent. What she recalled from her childhood was a piquant blend. “Shake Sugaree,” like all her work, is sure but seldom showy. The fancy picking Stefan adds towards the tune’s end suggests other Southeastern guitarists more than Cotten.

“God Moves On the Water” is a Vestapol (open D) tuning bottleneck tour de force taken from the 1929 recording of the great guitar evangelist, Blind Willie Johnson. The song concerns the sinking of the Titanic, a theme used in several folk songs to illustrate God’s punishment for man’s hubris. Mance Lipscomb’s version, also based on Johnson’s, appears in Texas Blues Guitar (Vestapol 13041).
“Dallas Rag” comes from the Dallas String Band by way of Dave Laibman, from whom Stefan learned this jaw-dropping arrangement. He remembers this as the ragtime showpiece which separated the men from the boys in the fraternity of early 1960s New York fingerstyle hot-shots.

“Friends Forever” is an original which almost – a few chord progressions excepted – sounds traditional. “Lena Anne” is another original which shows the impact his contact with English guitarists, especially Bert Jansch, had on Stefan’s compositions.

The next two performances were made in England in 1974. “Hot Dogs” is Blind Lemon Jefferson’s rather uncharacteristic contribution to the ragtime guitar idiom mixed with Rev. Gary Davis’s “Cincinnati Flow Rag” and some of Stefan’s own ragtime touches.

“Memphis Jelly Roll” is an original Spanish tuning slide workout which pits a Stella 12-string against a blues format incorporating some unconventional (by strict blue standards) chord changes.

The next two performances are from Italy, 1977. This was near the apex of the Kicking Mule era, when a lot of fresh ideas and players were challenging young veterans like Stefan. “Bermuda Triangle Exit” is a logical result, a blues-based tune with some wry, whimsical twists which likely wouldn’t have seemed ‘right’ to Stefan a decade prior. But they were perfect for that moment in 1977.
“Danish Drone” epitomizes the best of the Kicking Mule stylistic symbiosis as Stefan is joined by Duck Baker in a fiery foray through fingerstyle funk. It was a heady hour for acoustic guitar adventurers.

The next half dozen performances come from a 1982 American concert. If the previous Italian outings show Stefan pushing his generic envelope, here he returns to his roots. “Satisfied” is from the repertoire of Mississippi John Hurt, whom Stefan recalls as “the ideal elderly person...he came in gently, he left gently.” Hurt’s apparent innocence belied the risque edge of songs like this.

“Mississippi Blues” was learned from a Library of Congress recording by Willie Brown. “It’s the first time you really hear a blues guitar player doing a piano transcription,” says Stefan. “He does a Leroy Carr type of piano lick on that tune. It was a very sophisticated approach for 1942.” We also hear Stefan quote Robert Johnson following his mention of 1930s guitar players.

“Cocaine Blues” learned from Gary Davis, was one of several songs on the topic which probably date from the turn of the century, when cocaine was readily ingested via patent medicine nostrums. The reference to the doping of race horses also occurs in Leadbelly’s “Take a Whiff On Me.” Davis learned this song in 1905, the year prior to the elimination, thanks to the Pure Food and Drug Act, of cocaine from its namesake, Coca-Cola.

The sweetly melancholy “Pretty Girl Milking a Cow” is a piece Stefan has introduced on stage as “a stunning melody and a title quite absurd.” It was composed by the 18th century Irish harpist, Turlough O’Carolan. Stefan learned it from the playing of Duck Baker.

“Tightrope” is as musically ambitious as any of the original compositions in this collection. Stefan’s impressionistic evocation of a Herculean hangover turns fresh stones but is, like most of his music, deeply rooted in the blues. Astute ears will even notice passing quotes from the blues guitarist Stefan calls “the governor,” Lonnie Johnson.

“Vestapol/That’s No Way to Get Along” is an ebullient train trip on the open D express. ‘Vestapol’ is a corruption of Sebastapol, the siege of which during the Napoleonic Wars was celebrated in a 19th century guitar piece in open D. The open tunings used extensively by early 20th century blues guitarists seem to have come from popular ‘parlor guitar’
pieces of the previous century. “That’s No Way to Get Along” is the Robert Wilkins blues later revamped as “The Prodigal Son.”

The final two entries in this video retrospective return to Sweden in 1988. There we find Stefan in the company of John Renbourn, with whom he had then been performing for the better part of a decade. “Spirit Levels” is a chunky, funky duet which *New York Times* reviewer Robert Palmer called “a lovely, jazz-tinged ballad...with subtle string bending and delicate embroidery...” As an exception to the rule, Stefan does his stitching here with a flatpick. He says this staple of Grossman-Renbourn performances was “different every time. We were always improvising.”

The closing duet selection, “Looper’s Corner,” is a light chaser of a tune which refers back to the ragtime roots shared variously by Stefan and John. No matter where their music took them, they always brought along sweetly accessible souvenirs from home.

The last two tracks come from a 1995 performance at the Freight and Salvage in Berkeley, California. Stefan combined two night of concerts with daytime recording sessions with John Fahey and Pat Donohue.

— Mark Humphrey
Discography & Bibliography

The following compact discs, books and videos are all available. Detailed information regarding them can be obtained by writing Stefan Grossman's Guitar Workshop, PO Box 802, Sparta, NJ 07871.

Compact Discs

Love Devils & The Blues (Shanachie 97001)
Guitar Landscapes (Shanachie 97010)
Yazoo Basin Boogie (Shanachie 97013)
Shining Shadows (Shanachie 97020)
How To Play Blues Guitar (Shanachie 98001)
Black Melodies On A Clear Afternoon (Shanachie 98011)

Instructional Videos

Fingerpicking Guitar Techniques (GW 901)
Bottleneck Blues Guitar (GW 902)
How To Play Blues Guitar (GW 903)
Country Blues Guitar Part One (GW 904)
Country Blues Guitar Part Two (GW 905)
Country Blues Guitar Part Three (GW 906)
Hot Fingerpicking Guitar Solos (GW 912)
More Hot Fingerpicking Guitar Solos (GW 913)
Advanced Fingerpicking Guitar/Blues Guitar (GW 928)
Advanced Fingerpicking Guitar/Ragtime Blues Guitar (GW 929)
Advanced Fingerpicking Guitar/Hot Fiddle Tunes (GW 930)
Fingerpicking Country Blues Guitar (GW 931)

Instructional Books

Masters Of Country Blues Guitar Series:
Anthology Of Country Blues Guitar
Rev. Gary Davis
Blind Boy Fuller
Lonnie Johnson
Mississippi John Hurt
Blind Blake
Complete Country Blues Guitar Book
Complete Ragtime Guitar Book
Complete Celtic Fingerstyle Guitar Book
Fingerstyle Guitar/New Dimensions & Explorations
The Guitar Of John Fahey
The Classic Rags Of Scott Joplin
Complete Fingerstyle Guitar Book
Deluxe Anthology Of O’Carolan Music For Fingerstyle Guitar
Complete Fingerstyle Guitar Exercises & Hot Licks
Legends Of Country Blues Guitar
The Roots Of Robert Johnson
Fingerpicking Jazz Guitar Workshop
Beginner's Fingerpicking Guitar Workshop
Play Ragtime Guitar
Play Country Blues Guitar
Country Blues Songbook
The Holy Blues/Rev. Gary Davis
Anthology Of Blues Guitar:
Country Blues Guitar
Delta Blues Guitar
Ragtime Blues
Rev. Gary Davis/Blues Guitar
Texas Blues Guitar
Guitar Workshop Book Series:
Folk, Blues, Jazz & Beyond
Fingerpicking Blues Guitar Solos
Art Of Fingerstyle Guitar
Fingerpicking Guitar Solos
Classic Ragtime Guitar Solos
British Fingerpicking Guitar
Bottleneck Slide Blues Guitar
Celtic Airs, Jigs, Hornpipes & Airs
Masters Of Fingerpicking Guitar
Guitar Duets Of Stefan Grossman & John Renbourn
Fingerstyle Guitar Solos In Open Tunings
Guitars, Guitars & Guitars
by Stefan Grossman

I have been extremely fortunate to have owned and played many great guitars. Over the years I have searched far and wide for guitars in pawn shops, music stores, private homes, auctions and yard-sales. Just a few years ago my wife went to a furniture auction in Sussex County, New Jersey and found herself bidding on a dirty old parlor-sized guitar. The bidding started at $15.00 but no one was interested - the folks had come to buy furniture not guitars! She ended up buying the guitar for $10.00. Once we got it clean we discovered to our amazement that it was a Mauer made by the Larson brothers in 1905 at their Chicago shop. There are still treasures to be found but they are not as abundant as the 1950s or 1960s. Here’s a listing of the guitars used on this video. Some I still own while others have gone their way and are being picked by other players:

**Denmark, 1971**
Roll & Tumble Blues
Martin 1956 D-28 refinished by Randy Woods
High Society - 1930 Martin OM-45

**Sweden, 1972**
Shake Sugaree - 1939 Gibson Advanced Jumbo
God Moves On The Water - 1920s Stella Six String
Dallas Rag, Friends Forever, Lena Anne
1939 Gibson Advanced Jumbo

**England, 1974**
Hot Dogs - Euphonon (Maple)
Memphis Jellyroll - 1920s Stella Twelve String

**Italy, 1977**
Bermuda Triangle Exit and Danish Drone
Prairie State (Rosewood)

**U.S.A., 1981**
Satisfied, Mississippi Blues, Cocaine Blues,
Pretty Girl Milking A Cow, Tightrope and
Medley: Vestapol/That’s No Way To Get Along
Euphonon (Mahogany)

**Sweden 1988**
Spirit Levels and Looper’s Corner
Franklin Jumbo Cutaway (Indian Rosewood)

**U.S.A. 1995**
Struttin’ Rag and Blues For The Mann
Franklin Jumbo (Brazilian Rosewood)

Tab/Music Transcriptions
I have included transcriptions for some of the arrangements presented on this video. Have fun!
SHAKE SUGAREE

Standard Tuning

VERSE

C

0

1H

2H

3H

0

0

0

0

0

2:PO

3

0

3

0

0

3

0

0

3

0

3

0

3

0
God Moves On The Water
Open D Tuning: DADF #AD

[Music notation and tablature]

27
Dallas Rag

Standard Tuning

A

B

C

G7

(C)
Mississippi Blues

Regular Tuning

```
\begin{tikzpicture}[scale=0.8]
  % Guitar tablature code here
\end{tikzpicture}
```

33
Friends Forever

Standard Tuning

```
\textbf{A}
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
\hline
F & E & & \\
6 & 8 & 7 & 0 \\
\hline
3 & 8 & 7 & 6 & 6 \\
\hline
\end{array}
```

```
\textbf{D}
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
\hline
F & C & & \\
3 & 5 & 3 & 1 \\
\hline
3 & 4 & 2 & 0 & 0 \\
\hline
\end{array}
```

```
\textbf{F}
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
\hline
F & & & \\
2 & 3 & 0 & 3 \\
\hline
2 & 3 & 3 & 3 \\
\hline
\end{array}
```

```
\textbf{G7}
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
\hline
F & & & \\
0 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\
\hline
3 & 3 & 3 & 3 \\
\hline
\end{array}
```
Lena Anne

Standard Tuning

[Music notation and tablature for Lena Anne]
Cocaine Blues

Verse

C

F

G

C

B

A
Chorus

E

F

C

G

C
Cincinnati Flow Rag

Swing Rhythm:
into New York City Rag
Swing Rhythm:

Hot Dogs
Denmark, 1971
Roll & Tumble Blues
High Society

Sweden, 1972
Shake Sugaree
God Moves On The Water
Dallas Rag
Friends Forever
Lena Anne

England, 1974
Hot Dogs
Memphis Jellyroll

Italy, 1977
Bermuda Triangle Exit
Danish Drone
(w. Duck Baker)

U.S.A., 1981
Satisfied
Mississippi Blues
Cocaine Blues
Pretty Girl Milking A Cow
Tightrope
Medley: Vestapol/That's No Way To Get Along

Sweden 1988
Spirit Levels
(w. John Renbourn)
Looper’s Corner
(w. John Renbourn)

U.S.A., 1995
Struttin’ Rag
Blues For The Mann

“Stefan Grossman has done just about everything one can do in the field of music. He has been, among other things, a performer, a recording artist, a record company founder, a video producer, an A&R man, a record producer, a student, a teacher and a music historian. But it is his success in illuminating classic and contemporary country blues, ragtime and other fingerstyle guitar techniques that has made him, in the words of guitarist Dave Van Ronk, ‘one of the most important people in fingerpicking guitar in the history of the phenomenon.’” – Acoustic Guitar