

LEE RITENOUR'S 6 STRING THEORY

*It's hard to believe that 2010 marks 50 years since Lee Ritenour starting playing the guitar, setting in motion a career that legends are made of. A career that has earned him 19 GRAMMY® nominations, a GRAMMY Award, numerous #1 spots on guitar polls, a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Canadian SJ Awards and the prestigious Alumnus of the Year award from USC. He has recorded over 40 albums, with 35 chart songs, and was a founding member of the group Fourplay, considered the most successful band in contemporary jazz,. As a young guitarist, his diverse musical style became the foundation of over 3,000 sessions covering a broad spectrum of artists ranging from his first session at 16 with the Mamas and Papas, to Pink Floyd, Steely Dan, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Rollins, Simon & Garfunkel and Frank Sinatra. Not to forget the dazzling array of talent appearing on his solo works and collaborations; from his legendary work with Dave Grusin, to Phil Collins, Brazilian greats Ivan Lins, Caetano Veloso, and Djavan, to opera great Renee Fleming. On his latest endeavor, **6 STRING THEORY**, Ritenour celebrates the instrument that has allowed him this blessing, the guitar; —by producing and assembling a star-studded tribute with 20 of the greatest and soon- to- be greatest guitarists of our time. Incorporating all of his history, from jazz and classical to rock and blues, from acoustic to electric, Lee Ritenour's **6 String Theory** promises to be one of the greatest guitar recordings ever made!*

The liner notes by Jude Gold.....

“Is this a Lee Ritenour record? No. Is this a Lee Ritenour record? Yes.”—Lee Ritenour

Picture yourself in Henson Recording, once known as A&M Studios, the hallowed Hollywood tracking room in which Lee Ritenour is recording songs for the album you now hold in your hands. It's mid-session, the red light is on, and British rock/fusion phenomenon Guthrie Govan is performing his odd meter tour de force, “Fives.” With the tubes in his amp scorching hot, and his fingers even hotter, the young guitar hero is melding every progressive shred guitar approach you can name—pick sweeping, string tapping, pinch harmonics, and more—into unified sheets of sound that magically seem to channel Coltrane, Paganini, and Zappa all at once. Ritenour looks pleased. Meanwhile, another person has just entered the control room, and he, too, is watching Govan's guitar pyrotechnics: American blues/rock wunderkind Joe Bonamassa. Fresh off his most successful year yet—a year that found him headlining and selling out London's Royal Albert Hall, no less—Bonamassa is up next to record for Ritenour. “Man,” he jokes when he meets Govan a few minutes later, “I didn't play that many notes all last year.” “Yeah,” replies Govan, “but you played the right ones.”

Few things encapsulate the spirit of **6 String Theory** more succinctly than this friendly little exchange—two immensely successful but utterly disparate musicians checking their egos at the door to take part in a world-class celebration of the guitar; a celebration put on by one of the most versatile and successful performers, composers, session players, producers, and solo artists the instrument has ever known. If guitarists sometimes live up to any reputation they may have for being a competitive, high-maintenance, even backstabbing bunch, they certainly didn't do so on the *Six String* sessions. The camaraderie throughout was genuine, and it arose in large part from one thing: the immense respect every corner of the music industry pays Lee Ritenour.

One obvious measure of this respect is the album's astonishingly high headcount of world-famous guest guitarists—a whopping 20 of them—and the wide range of genres they represent. After all, it's not just any artist who can reel in everyone **from B.B. King to Jonny Lang, George Benson to Slash, John Scofield to Taj Mahal, Keb Mo to Neal Schon, Steve Lukather to Vince Gill, Mike Stern to Pat Martino**, plus many other iconic guitarists, and get them all to guest on his record.

“One day, I just had this vision,” says Ritenour of the motivation behind the project. “Maybe it was inspired by YouTube, the way you can spend an hour on there and see clips of every amazing guitar player under the sun. Or maybe it was inspired by the fact that I love so many different styles of guitar, and have since I was a kid, and have played most of them throughout my career. But it just occurred to me how great

it would be to be able to hear a whole bunch of today's greatest guitarists doing their thing on one album. And with my background, I realized I might be a good guy to produce it. Plus, what a fine way to celebrate my 50th year playing the guitar! So I spoke to Concord Records A&R head John Burk, a fellow guitarist and

-more-

Page two.....

the album's eventual co-producer, and said, 'What about it? Doable?' He loves to aim high like this, so he said yes, and jumped all over the idea."

In the era of the World Wide Web, when doing a "guest appearance" on an album can be as impersonal and remote a contribution as pulling a rough song mix mp3 out of an email, slapping it into Pro Tools, and then pasting a solo onto it and emailing that solo to an artist who is several cities, states, or even oceans away, one nice thing about **6 String** is that you're hearing *real* recording dates. These aren't cut-and-paste mail-order tracks. Aside from B.B. King (whom Ritenour overdubbed in Las Vegas) country superstar Vince Gill (who tracked in Nashville), and Japanese rock guitar star Tomoyasu Hotei (who recorded in his home country), all of the guest performers were recorded by Ritenour and engineer Don Murray in-house in L.A., usually live with the stellar rhythm sections listed herein.

Naturally, some invitations went out to players with whom Ritenour has worked closely or at least been good friends for decades. The first on that list was the King of the Blues himself, B.B. King. "Over the years, I've done numerous jam sessions with him at festivals all over the world," shares Ritenour. "He always had a knack for inviting amazing guitarists to sit in with him and have fun, and for that reason he is one of the main inspirations behind the album. I've always been honored to play with him, and I am honored to have him on the record."

A couple other good friends Ritenour invited were jazz/fusion icon John Scofield ("Sco has one of the most singular guitar voices I've ever heard, and it has earned him fans from every genre"), as well as Toto kingpin, contributing **6 String** producer/writer, and fellow session legend Steve Lukather. "Luke is known for his great solos, insane chops, great arrangements, singing, Grammy awards, and all that, but he can also play the shit out of a melody, so I made sure to put him in that role at least once on this record," says Ritenour, who gave Lukather the lyrical guitar theme on "In Your Dreams." "Luke is like a younger brother to me, and it was great to have his input throughout. He has the same musical tastes as me and loves everything from rock, blues, and bebop, to country and classical. In fact, he championed heavily for the inclusion of our young classical guitarist, Shon Boulil, on the record.

"Luke also brought in Slash and Neal Schon," adds Ritenour, who was thrilled to be in the same room working with the Guns N' Roses and Journey legends at the same time. "Watching Neal play, I couldn't stop thinking how I had first heard about this great young guitar player when we were both around 16, and he was already playing with Santana and doing other amazing stuff. And then, after all these years, there we were, finally jamming together."

Ritenour also strived to include on the album active guitar stars from the widest possible generational extremes, a range spanning B.B. King (now in his eighties) to 18-year-old Aussie fingerstyle extraordinaire Joe Robinson. "I had heard Joe was incredible, and it turned out that he was opening a concert I did in Germany," shares Ritenour. "I missed his set, but introduced myself to him in his dressing room later. He had his guitar there, played a little for me, and I instantly told him, 'I want you on the record.' He's *that* amazing. Luke was so impressed by him, he said the album's back cover should be a photo of the rest of us gathered around him, holding a gun to his head [*laughs*]."

If you notice that Ritenour is the only one trading solos with jazz genius Pat Martino, well, there may be a reason: "Pat has inspired us all, but I think he's so good it's almost intimidating," says Ritenour, laughing. "I think everyone else I asked to join him was a bit shy about that prospect, myself included. I ended up writing a song for Pat and myself to play on, so at least I knew how the tune went!" Another of *Six String*'s captivating jazz guests is Mike Stern. "Mike is only getting more amazing, because he never stops playing.

I saw him recently at Catalina Jazz Club in L.A., and the late set ended around 1 a.m., and he still wanted to keep playing. He said, 'Come on, Lee, let's go back to the hotel and jam.' I was like, 'Mike, go to sleep.' [*Laughs*.]"

Back to the blues front, among the album's other bluesmen (or players whose music at least has a deep blue streak) is Grammy winner Keb Mo. "Keb Mo is a Los Angeles-raised guitarist who grew up with a lot of similar tastes as myself," says Ritenour. "When it came to selecting some of the blues material, Keb was

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Page three....

very helpful, and musically we were always on the same page. He brought in Taj Mahal, who is also one of the most versatile musicians on the planet. I loved hearing the two of them jam together on one of my favorite Keb tunes, 'Am I wrong.'

"Vince Gill," continues Ritenour, "is one of the most famous pop and country guitarists on the planet, and he was one of the guys that I did not know before. He was a total sweetheart, and he was willing to play on anything. Instead of having Vince, predictably, play a country track, I had him join B.B. King, Keb, and Jonny Lang on B.B.'s tune, 'Why I Sing the Blues.' I love Vince's performance on that track. He is *too* funky. And, then, right after him, Jonny swoops in with that fire he brings."

The final bluesman to make the album was Robert Cray, who sings and plays guitar alongside Joe Bonamassa on a soulful re-imagining of Tracy Chapman's "Give Me One Reason." "Robert was one of my first choices for this record," recalls Ritenour, "but it wasn't until the last week of production, right before the last mixing session, that our schedules finally lined up. The entire recording process for this album has been like that—many little miracles helping us along the way."

Ritenour also reached out to several players just now making their mark on guitar-dom, including solo steel-string sensation Andy McKee. "Twenty-eight million views don't lie," says Ritenour of McKee's massive YouTube following. "The way he plays acoustic guitar percussively and melodically at the same time is very cool. I actually told Paulinho Da Costa, who is one of the world's greatest percussionists, and who plays on Andy's track, to lay back and think of himself as the *second* percussionist on the date."

If the new measure of a thrilling album is one that shatters the traditional mold, then *Six String* passes the test, because it's more than just a musical snapshot of an artist. It's a partnership, a vision—a *mission*. One exciting and altruistic part of that mission was Ritenour's intent to help launch a new star of the guitar. First, though, he had to find this person. How did he do it? Partnering with Yamaha, Berklee College of Music, Monster Cable, D'Addario, and Concord Records, he held an international talent search. Ultimately, seventeen finalists from several different genres were invited to compete at a concert hall in Santa Monica, California, to win a spot on the album. Before a panel of judges that included Ritenour, Lukather, and others, it was 16-year-old Canadian classical guitarist Shon Boulblil who won top honors.

"The contest was a really cool way to let some new blood onto an established album with established artists," says Ritenour, who recorded Boulblil's tracks the day after he won the competition. "There were a lot of great finalists, but what was interesting about Shon's performance is that even though he had only been playing for five years, he showed zero fear, which is a sign of a great guitarist. He was up there playing this very exposed and extremely difficult classical music, and he just sailed through it."

Like Boulblil's pieces, George Benson's "My One and Only Love" is performed solo, and it exemplifies the higher purpose of **6 String Theory**. "I'm probably on more tracks than anybody on this record, but I'm certainly not on everything, because this record isn't about me," says Ritenour. "It's about guitar. This song showcases George Benson, the George I grew up listening to, the George that plays bebop and kind of shreds on the guitar. Celebrating the guitar like this with friends I've known for years, and friends I've only just made, has made this a dream album to me. And I was the one who got the most out of it because I stole something from everybody [*laughs*]."

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