

Alex de Grassi

Often cited as one of the world's top fingerstyle, steel-string guitarists, Grammy nominee Alex de Grassi brings a unique voice to the art of acoustic guitar with his evocative compositions and arrangements, a highly-orchestrated sound, and sheer virtuosity. *The Wall Street Journal* has called his playing "flawless" and *Billboard* hails his "intricate finger-picking technique with an uncanny gift for melodic invention." De Grassi's trademark is an ability to create a highly orchestrated sound in his solo guitar music. His playing weaves together melody, counter-melody, bass, harmony, rhythm, and cross-rhythms creating a canvas of sound unheard of in a solo guitar performance. Using a broad palette of techniques and timbre, and driven by a unique sense of composition, his rich performances take the listener beyond the instrument.

His career has drawn acclaim for numerous recordings released by Windham Hill, RCA Novus, Tropo Records, 33rd Street, and other labels, as well as for his live performances as a soloist and within ensemble settings. In 2006, Alex successfully showcased original steel-string guitar compositions in two exciting commissions: a solo guitar score for the New York Guitar Festival's silent film festival at Flushing Town Hall, and a concerto for steel-string guitar, string quartet, and chamber orchestra, commissioned by String Letter Publishing as part of their 20th anniversary celebration at Herbst Theater in San Francisco.

Alex's most recent release, *Now and Then: Folk Songs for the 21st Century* (33rd Street Records), is a solo guitar recording featuring contemporary arrangements of 11 treasured tunes from the American standards repertoire. Guest artists Michael Manring and Joe Craven join de Grassi on two tracks. *Now and Then* is Alex's attempt to tell a few American stories and weave a musical fabric whose threads reach through time to unite the present with the past...music for now and then. "In rediscovering these songs," he explains, "I came to appreciate the maxim that folk music is a 'living' tradition, and that each generation will find relevance and a way to reinterpret these songs. In that spirit, I have arranged traditional melodies to reflect the musical idioms and social climate of today's multi-cultural landscape."

Such a broad and creative vision is to be expected from de Grassi. Born in Yokosuka, Japan, and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, Alex was exposed from his earliest years to a variety of musical influences. His grandfather led a string quartet and was violinist with the San Francisco Symphony. His father was trained in classical piano, while his mother was a fan of jazz. "The two recordings I heard the most as a child," de Grassi recalls, "were Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 and the Louis Armstrong/Ella Fitzgerald version of Porgy & Bess." His first instrument was trumpet, but at age 13 de Grassi switched to guitar and began playing folk and blues and popular music. Early influences include British fingerstyle acoustic guitarists Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, American innovators Leo Kottke, John Fahey and Ralph Towner, and much of the rock, pop, and jazz music of the Sixties.

Though largely self-taught, de Grassi briefly studied jazz guitar with noted teacher Bill Thrasher while attending the University of California at Santa Barbara, and took music courses while pursuing a degree in Economic Geography at the University of California at Berkeley. Since embarking on a recording and concert career, Alex has continued to study classical and jazz guitar. He has also studied jazz piano with Bay Area great Mark Levine as well as composition with the renowned teacher and author William A. Mathieu.

De Grassi recorded his first album, *Turning: Turning Back*, in 1978 for Will Ackerman's start-up Windham Hill label (*Acoustic Guitar* magazine cites this album among the top ten essential fingerstyle

recordings). The overwhelmingly positive response to the album and the follow-up, *Slow Circle*, launched him on a career as one of the most innovative fingerstyle guitarists and composers of guitar music.

Over the last three decades as a soloist and collaborator, de Grassi has explored a variety of music influences, and has stretched his repertoire to include interpretations of jazz classics and folk melodies from around the world. His recordings *Clockwork*, *Altiplano*, *The World's Getting Loud*, and *Beyond The Night Sky: Lullabies for Guitar* (Parents' Choice Gold Award Winner) feature guest musicians such as Patrick O'Hearn, Zakir Hussein, Luis Conte, Paul McCandless, and Mark Egan.

Alex's latest foray into collaborative works is with deMania trio with bassist Michael Manring and percussionist Chris Garcia. Their first recording will be released in fall 2006.

Alex has toured extensively on the concert circuit, performing in Europe, Japan and throughout North America, including such venues as Carnegie Hall, the Interlochen Festival, the Montreux Jazz Festival, and the Belfast International Festival. He has also traveled to Bolivia (inspiring the title track for his RCA/Novus recording, *Altiplano*) studying and gathering Andean music and helping bring about the Arawi recording of the Contemporary Orchestra of Native Instruments for New Albion Records.

In addition to recording and performing, de Grassi keeps active with other projects. He has scored music for *Mirrors of the Heart* for use in the television series *Americas*, and was the subject of a PBS concert/interview television show, *Alex de Grassi: The Artist's Profile*.

Alex's tenth recording, *The Water Garden* (Tropo Records, August 1998), garnered both GRAMMY® and Indie Award nominations and was named Crossroads Magazine's Best Acoustic Instrumental Recording of the year. *Shortwave Postcard* (Auditorium) was picked as one of Acoustic Guitar Magazine's Top CDs of 2002.

De Grassi penned the introduction to the popular coffee-table artbook/reference tome, *Custom Guitars: A Complete Guide to Contemporary Custom Guitars* (String Letter Publishing). He has published many of his guitar transcriptions with Hal Leonard, Stropes Editions, and numerous guitar magazines. He has been a frequent guest teacher at the National Summer Guitar Workshop, the Milwaukee Conservatory of Music, and the Omega Institute. In the spring of 2006, Alex was the first artist-in-residence at the nation's first steel-string guitar degree program at the University of Milwaukee. De Grassi is on the advisory boards of the New York Guitar Festival, and Giant Steps Therapeutic Equestrian Center.

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