

Alex de Grassi has been a unique voice in the world of acoustic guitar for the past 42 years; his innovative approach to composing and arranging for solo steel-string guitar has influenced a generation of younger players. From his first solo performances in university coffeehouses and as a street musician to his engagements at prestigious venues including Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and the Montreux Jazz Festival, Alex has followed his own vision and helped lay the foundation for contemporary fingerstyle guitar. Inspired by American and British Isles folk and blues artists in his early teens, Alex's musical pursuits soon expanded to encompass classical, jazz, and world music. He has since become known for his evocative compositions and arrangements, and for his sheer virtuosity. Using a broad palette of techniques and timbre in conjunction with his ability to weave together melody, counter-melody, bass, harmony, and rhythm into a highly orchestrated canvas of sound, Alex's performances take the listener well beyond the instrument. The Wall Street Journal has called his playing "flawless" and Billboard hails his "intricate finger-picking technique with an uncanny gift for melodic invention."

Alex's career has drawn acclaim for numerous studio recordings as well as for live performances as a soloist and within ensemble settings. His 1978 recording, *Turning: Turning Back* (cited by Acoustic Guitar magazine among their top ten essential fingerstyle recordings), the subsequent recordings *Slow Circle* (1979) and *Southern Exposure* (1984), and his GRAMMY® nominated recording *The Water Garden* (1998) are considered classics of the genre. In 2006, he collaborated with Quartet San Francisco leader and violinist Jeremy Cohen to premiere an original concerto for steel-string guitar, string quartet, and string orchestra, commissioned and published by String Letter Publishing for their 20th anniversary celebration at Herbst Theater in San Francisco. He has twice been commissioned by the New York Guitar Festival to compose and perform live scores for the festival's Silent Films/Live Guitars series. Festival director David Spelman says "Alex de Grassi is a treasure... his technical wizardry as well as his vibrant and poetic music-making make him one of the most distinctive steel-string guitarists performing today."

His latest solo studio recording, *the Bridge* (released in April 2020), features six new original compositions plus arrangements of Gershwin (*It Ain't Necessarily So*), Hendrix (*Angel*), and a pair of classic folksongs (*Shenandoah*, *Sí Bheag Sí Mhór*). Pop Matters says "The Bridge provides further evidence of his compositional prowess and his ability to fuse the heady world of virtuosity with deep emotions. His inimitable voice remains intact and as awe inspiring as ever." His first solo guitar recording in 17 years since his *Now and Then: Folk Songs for the 21st Century* (Tropo Records/33rd Street 2003), *The Bridge* was recorded by multi- GRAMMY® award winner and TEC Hall of Fame engineer Leslie Ann Jones at the legendary Skywalker Sound studio in Northern California. "I had played on a live audiophile broadcast at Skywalker the year before" Alex explains, "and after taking my guitar out of the case and playing a couple of notes in that space, I knew I wanted to make my next solo recording there. It's a truly amazing sounding room, and with Leslie Ann on the other side of the glass, I knew we would capture the sound of the best concert halls I've ever performed in. I wasn't disappointed!"

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 assistant concertmaster with the San Francisco Symphony. His father was trained in classical piano and his mother was a lover 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.



Alex de Grassi

BIO

De Grassi is largely self-taught, but briefly studied jazz guitar with noted teacher Bill Thrasher--author of many Joe Pass books--while at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Since embarking on a recording and concert career, Alex has continued to study classical guitar. He has also studied jazz piano with Bay Area great Mark Levine as well as composition with renowned teacher, pianist, and author William A. Mathieu.

Over the last four plus decades as a soloist and collaborator, de Grassi has explored a variety of musical directions and has stretched his repertoire to include interpretations of jazz classics with *Bolivian Blues Bar*, and *Tatamonk*, a collaboration with Chilean folk musician Quique Cruz. His recordings *Clockwork*, *Altiplano*, *The World's Getting Loud*, and *Beyond The Night Sky: Lullabies for Guitar* (Parents' Choice Gold Award Winner) feature such guest musicians as Patrick O'Hearn, Zakir Hussein, Luis Conte, Paul McCandless, and Mark Egan. Since then, Alex's continuing forays into collaborative work include the deMania Trio with bassist Michael Manring and percussionist Chris Garcia, with violinist Jeremy Cohen's Quartet San Francisco and most recently, the de Grassi/York duo with GRAMMY® award winning classical guitarist Andrew York.

Alex has toured extensively on the concert and festival circuit, performing in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and throughout North America. 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 2008 he made his classical guitar debut with a performance of Rodrigo's *Concerto for Aranjuez* in Ukiah, California with the Ukiah Symphony.

In addition to recording and performing, de Grassi keeps active with other projects. He scored music for *Mirrors of the Heart* for the television series *Americas*, and was the subject of a PBS concert/interview television show, *Alex de Grassi: The Artist's Profile*. In the Fall of 2011 he appeared in conversation with neuroscientist and author Daniel Levitin at the San Francisco's Commonwealth Club's live INFORUM discussion of Dr. Levitin's best-selling book *This is Your Brain on Music*, rebroadcast on 250 NPR affiliates.

In addition to the GRAMMY® nomination, Alex's tenth recording, *The Water Garden* garnered an Indie Award nomination 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.

Alex has also taught master classes at the Interlochen Institute, Berklee School of Music, the Omega Institute, the Crown of the Continent Guitar Workshop, and the National Summer Guitar Workshop. He also founded and continues to conduct the Mendocino Summer Guitar Workshop near his home in Albion, California. His guitar transcriptions have been published with Hal Leonard, Stropes Editions, Tropo Music and numerous guitar magazines. The *Alex de Grassi Fingerstyle Guitar Method*, a reference book on the fundamentals of acoustic guitar technique published by String Letter Publishing in March 2012, is being used as a primary text for the first fingerstyle guitar degree program at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee where Alex is a frequent artist-in-residence. He has also penned introductions to both the popular coffee table art book/reference tome, *Custom Guitars: A Complete Guide to Contemporary Custom Guitars*, and *From These Woods: The Guitar Makers of Santa Cruz County*. He has recorded instructional videos for Homespun, Hal Leonard, Tropo Records, and *On the Path*.

