

Philadelphia Ace: Chuck Anderson

by Ed Benson



EB: Tell me about your background-personal and musical

CA: I was born in Chicago on June 21st, 1947. Most of my early years were spent in sports - basketball and baseball. I had no interest in music. At the age of twelve, my family moved to the Philadelphia suburb of Radnor in Pennsylvania. I attended grade school in Wayne and then, high school in Devon, Pennsylvania. After high school, I enrolled in St Joseph's University where I completed a Bachelor of Science degree in Marketing.

EB: When did you take up the guitar and why?

CA: My involvement with the guitar was completely accidental. One summer holiday, when I was fourteen, my family was attending a neighborhood picnic. The neighbor was an amateur but enthusiastic guitar player. He had just purchased a new guitar - a Goya, as I recall. He was alternately strumming the guitar and cooking on the grill. I wandered over to get a hamburger. He took my proximity to indicate an interest in the guitar. In reality, I was only interested in a hamburger. He asked me if I liked the guitar. I shrugged indifferently

and said "not really". Undeterred, he said "I'll go get my old guitar in the attic and you can take it home and try it". I declined but he insisted. My mother heard this conversation and impressed upon me that it would be rude to not accept such a generous gift. I reluctantly took the guitar home and stored it under my bed.

One day, I had turned my ankle playing basketball and had to rest the foot. Having nothing to do, I pulled the guitar out from under the bed and slowly played a chord from a sheet of chord diagrams that was in the guitar case. Once I heard the Em chord, my life turned in the direction of music.

EB: Did you study or are you self taught? Did you study music in college?

CA: I began taking lessons at a local music store at the age of fourteen. I progressed rapidly and was "promoted" to my next teacher. Dennis Sandole was at that time, one of the best known jazz teachers in the country. I auditioned for him but wasn't ready to study with him. He suggested that I get in touch with one of his students by the name of Joe Federico. I worked with Joe for three years preparing for the next stage. Sandole accepted me as a student when I was nineteen. He was to be my final jazz guitar teacher.

I did not study music in college. I did all of my studies with private teachers. In later years, I studied classical composition and orchestration with Dr Harold Boatrite, a noted Philadelphia composer and teacher.

EB: When did you plan to make music your livelihood?

CA: My direction turned seriously to a music career when I was a junior in college. By the time I graduated, it was a foregone conclusion that music would become my life. The day I graduated, I remember looking at my diploma, then my guitar, then my diploma and then my guitar. It was a warm summer day, the windows were open and I impulsively through my diploma out the window. In this way, I suppose I symbolically rejected the business world.

EB: Who were your main influences?

CA: My two main influences were Wes Montgomery and Johnny Smith.

EB: When and what was your first paying gig?

CA: My first paying work was a school dance in the

gym at St Katherine of Sienna. I played with a group called the Ravens and was payed the princely sum of four dollars. I was fourteen at the time.

EB:Do you remember any disastrous gigs?

CA:One disaster stands out. On a New Years eve, our band was playing at a Polish American club. An argument broke out over the winner of a Twist contest. Someone swung a liquor bottle, somebody punched a woman in the face and somebody else picked up a table and tossed it at a group of people. Chaos was everywhere but we kept playing. Bottles broke around us like the Blues Brothers. Just then, my father came to pick me up since I didn't drive. The police arrived and dragged my father down the steps toward the paddy wagon. After some ridiculous moments, he was free to go on his way. That story is forever etched in my memory bank.

EB:I know you played at the Latin Casino in NJ. Tell me about those days. How did you get the gig-who did you work with-any special memories of it? Why did you leave the gig? What did you do after you left?

CA:I first got the call in the summer after I graduated college. One of the acts coming to the Latin needed a guitar player but the Latin's staff guitar player had taken an engagement in Vegas and was unavailable. Apparently no one was available that week. My name was the bottom name on the list of guitar players that the contractor kept. I was totally unknown but they had no choice but to call me. Somehow, I managed to get through my first shows and the act spoke well of me. Amazingly, I was standing in the contractor's office when the phone rang. It was the Latin's guitar player, Joe Lano calling from Vegas. He said "I'm not coming back to the Latin. They've offered me a job at one of the casinos here in Vegas". The contractor turned to me and said "do you want the job here"? It took two seconds to say yes!

I played at the Latin for the next four years. Fourteen shows a week and rehearsal on Monday afternoons. I had the opportunity to work with amazing acts such as Peggy Lee, Michel LeGrande, Bobby Darin, Sammy Davis Jr, Billy Eckstine, Anthony Newley and Nancy Wilson among many others.

I have many memories of the Latin - enough to fill a small book. I have told the Latin Casino story on You

Tube and have had some great responses. I've heard from waiters who worked there and Jack Curtis' grandson. Jack was the Master of Ceremonies for the Latin.

EB:Tell me about the trio you formed in the 1970s

CA:After four years of reading, I wanted to stretch out with my own group. I began writing and formed the Chuck Anderson Trio in 1973. The group featured Al Stauffer on Bass and Ray Deeley on Drums. Jimmy Paxson and Darryl Brown also drummed for the trio. We recorded "Mirror Within a Mirror in the mid 70's. This album later became a CD, recently remastered by Alan Tucker called "The Vintage Tracks." We did jazz concert work and featured originals with new versions of jazz classics.

EB:I believe you pioneered the neo classical guitar-what is this?

CA:The term Neo Classical guitar has been used in many different contexts, To some, it is a metal style of lead guitar that uses scales like the Harmonic and Melodic minor scales as well as diminished 7th arpeggios. The stress is on speed.

The Neo Classical guitar is a solo pick style using the amplified or acoustic guitar to play classical transcriptions, original works and variations on international folk themes. During the eight years that I worked with in this style, I was endorsed by the Gibson Guitar company and called "the new Segovia" by PBS.

I released a CD called "Kaleidophon : The Art of the Neo Classical Guitar". Here is a listing of the tracks on this CD.

1. Prelude from #1 Cello Suite (Bach) - Original Transcription
2. Variations on an Ancient Irish Air (Traditional) - Irish Folk Theme
3. 'Twas a Lover and his Lass (Traditional) - English Folk Song
4. Cherry Blossom (Traditional) - Japanese Folk Song
5. Kaleidophon (Original)
6. Lute Prelude in Dm (Bach) - Original Transcription
7. Bamboo Flute (Traditional) - Chinese Folk Song
8. The Three Children (Original)
9. Gymnopedies #1 (Satie) - the first of three works written for solo piano
10. Indian Raga (Improvised) - Drones, exotic scales



Chuck's group - Eric Schreiber on Bass and Ed Rick on Drums. Chuck is playing his green L5.



Pat Martino, Chuck Anderson, Pat's wife Aya and Chuck's wife Coreen at Chris's Cafe.

and rapid complex rhythm

11. Prelude for Piano (Ravel) - Original Transcription
12. El Colibri (Sagreras) - Original Transcription
13. Passages from the End of Autumn (Original)
14. Themes from a Shattered Moonbow (Original)
15. Scotland the Brave - Scottish Folk Song
16. Ave Maria (Schubert) - Original Transcription

I have mastered two more Neo Classical CDs called "Virtuosity" and "Timeless" that I hope to release soon.

EB: Tell me about some of the recordings and books you've done.

CA: My jazz recordings are "The Vintage Tracks" and "Angel Blue - A Tour of Jazz." Because of my extensive writing background, I have also recorded the following CDs: "The International Collection," "Passages from the End of Autumn," "Music from the Light," "Christmas Wishes," "Kaleidophon: The Art of the Neo Classical Guitar" and "Lullabies for Parents."

I have spent a huge amount of time developing educational concepts for jazz guitarists. Some of my books are:

- The Six Secrets of Guitar Fingering
- The Pathways of Guitar
- Music Pursuing The Horizon
- Mastering the Modes
- Modular Phonetic Rhythm, The Foundation and Workbook 1
- The Private Music Teacher's Guide
- Volume I - Lead sheets to Chuck Anderson's Tour of Jazz CD.
- Unlocking the Guitar - Notes of the Neck

EB: What's in the future in terms of recordings, books and performances.

CA: I am getting ready to record a new CD called "From the Heart" featuring my trio and twelve new compositions. The DVD called "The Chuck Anderson Trio - Live!" will be released soon.

I have many new books under development. "Master Picking," "Bebop for Guitar Players," "Harmonic Analysis for Jazz Improvisation" and "The Evolution of Blues" are some of the new titles.

I will focus my attention on concert venues, colleges and jazz festivals. I am also working with Mike's Master Classes on a new master class called

"Navigating the Guitar." I have an extensive schedule of lectures, master classes, private teaching, consulting and clinics. I was a guest on Bob Miles show "Miles of Music" in May of this year.

EB: What's your current setup in terms of guitar/amp etc.

CA: I use a custom Gibson L5 guitar with an Acoustic Image Clarus II, Series III amp and two Raezer's Edge Stealth 12 cabinets.

EB: Tell me about your role as an educator and lecturer.

CA: I began teaching at the age of sixteen and have taught extensively and continuously for the past forty five years. I owned my own private music school for many years. I currently focus on my private students.

Over and above teaching, I lecture for The American Institute for History Education. I discuss the role of music in society during five periods of American history. I also lecture on Jazz Guitar, Improvisation, Composition and the Music Business.

EB: What's the story behind the theft of your Gibson L5 and your not playing for a long time. What got you back into playing again? Did you teach during those years?

CA: My original Gibson L5 was stolen after a concert. The loss was so devastating to me that I couldn't play concerts for a very long time. One of America's greatest luthiers, Eric Schulte offered to customize an L5 for me if I would agree to go back and give concerts again. I agreed and he produced the customized green L5 that I play today. Jack Romano also worked on the final version of the instrument.

I never stopped teaching. It's not unusual for me to teach sixteen hours in a day.

EB: How do you approach teaching jazz? What methods do you use in teaching the guitar?

CA: My approach to teaching jazz is holistic. I break the material down into musical and mechanical technique, chord voicings, voice leading, comping, fingering principles, rhythm, melody and chords, improvisation, theory, ear training and repertoire.

I stress the development of the unique personality of each student. I never focus on my own style as a play-

er. I play very rarely during a lesson preferring to maximize the student's time on his or her own development. The methods I use are my own.

EB: Any of the newer players you enjoy listening to?

CA: I have never listened extensively to any specific players nor have I ever worked out solos or riffs associated with any particular player.

EB: I know you play at Chris Café in PA. Have you played with Jimmy Bruno there? If so how was the experience?

CA: I have not played with Jimmy. He is one of our finest jazz guitarists and I've been interested in proposing a concert with Jimmy, Pat Martino and I at The World Cafe Live in Philadelphia. Pat was kind enough to attend a recent performance at Chris' in February.

Frank DiBussolo and I gave a jazz guitar duo performance in The Great Guitar Series at Macungie Institute in late March.

EB: Is there a market for jazz?

CA: I feel that there is a tremendous market for jazz. The recording industry's shortcomings seem to be providing a boost in the demand for live concerts. Jazz is at its best live. They can't download the "live" experience. The Internet has provided unprecedented opportunities to spread the word of jazz all over the world.

Personal

My wife Coreen is a constant source of inspiration for me. Check out "Song for Coreen" on You Tube, a solo jazz guitar piece. I have three children Chris, Nicole and Silke. My parents are Bill and Catherine Anderson and I have two sisters Carol and Sue.

My website is at www.ChuckAndersonGuitar.com

From Bob Miles:

Miles of Music (Formerly, World of Guitar) is now airing on 14 separate cable systems throughout the USA. The show began airing in Los Angeles starting April 13th on LA Channel #36.

In May, Miles of Music began a regular show on PBS Philadelphia (2.7 million) on MIND TV (Formerly, WYBE).

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