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PETE HUTTLINGER

Have Guitar, Will Travel

by Bill Piburn



*For me,
music wasn't
something I
wanted to
do, it was
something I
wanted to
discover.*



After a day of demanding classes at Berklee College of Music, Pete Huttlinger would grab a friend, rush down to the Harvard Square subway and spend the afternoon playing for tips. The two always came back with their pockets filled. For Pete, this routine symbolized what has become his abiding outlook towards music – perfect your art, but play to the crowd.

As a sideman, Pete has performed with artists such as John Denver, SheDaisy and LeAnn Rimes. He has performed in venues such as the Hollywood Bowl, London's Royal Albert Hall, Caesar's Palace, The Tonight Show and Stadiums around the world. As a studio musician, Pete has performed on numerous Grammy winning and Grammy nominated recordings. He has been nominated for an Emmy for music he both composed and performed for a PBS special, and wrote the theme for ESPN's Fly-Fishing America. Pete has been a featured artist with the Houston and San Diego symphonies as well as the Nashville Chamber Orchestra. In 2000, he won the title of National Fingerstyle Champion at the prestigious Walnut Valley Festival.

Tell me about your new recording.

It's titled *The Santa Rita Connection*. I'm very proud of it. I think it may be my best playing to date. I wrote most of the material and it's all solo but one. I'm very pleased with the quality I'm getting in my studio. I spent several months investigating sounds and microphones. I know now that I've got a great studio.

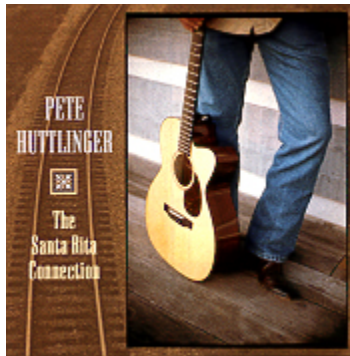
What gear do you have?

It's your basic Pro Tools studio but I have some great gear on the front end – I have two vintage Neumann KM84 microphones that I run through a UA2610 pre-amp. The 84s bring out every warm tone of the guitar. I used to use the 184s but the tone is drastically different.

How did you discover the KM84?

I've been involved in studio work for several years and I've learned a lot just asking the engineers questions about gear. It's generally known how great this microphone is. They're hard

to find, they haven't been made for years and people really covet them. I know several players who take them to their sessions. I found mine through a guy named Bill Bradley at the Mic Shop in Nashville. I'd called him to repair my Neumann 184s and he said, "It wouldn't be worth the cost of repair, you need a pair of the KM84s and I have a set." I was down there in thirty minutes!



It makes you wonder why they don't make them anymore – whatever the cost may be, if it's the best, the professional will pay for it.

I think a lot of studios and engineers have B grade gear and just don't know it. We tend to

buy what someone with more experience tells us and many times they just haven't had exposure to what's out there. All the companies make gear that looks killer but most people don't get the chance to play on a lot of stuff before they buy. I've been fortunate enough to have played on some great gear and every time I go into the studio I ask the engineer, "What mic, what mic-pre?"

I know you engineered your new recording. How did you manage that as well as playing?

Well as I said, I use Pro Tools Digi 002 system. Pro Tools is computer-based software that comes with a mixer. I run a long firewire cable to the mixer and have it in the booth with me. It's fully functional, so I can start, stop, and rewind from the board in the booth. It's a little tricky at first but after a couple of weeks, it's really not difficult.

Let's talk about some of the tunes on the new project.

Well the title cut, "The Santa Rita Connection," is one I open

all my shows with. It's a showstopper – once you've played that you can play something slow and it's ok. [Laughter] When I started writing it, I had this little "chicken picking" thing that eventually evolved, but it took a year. I wrote a couple of tunes for friends; one titled "Darcy's Guitar," for Darcy Cotten who co-owns Cotten music with Kim Sherman. I played it for Kim one day and she said, "I want a tune but I want mine in a minor key." I came up with a Celtic thing that's really two jigs put together – you guessed it, it's called "Kim Sherman's Jigs."

I have a fun arrangement of "I've Got Rhythm." It's such a great chord progression – you know Gershwin set the world on fire with that progression, no telling how many tunes are based on those changes. I'm a big fan of Merle Travis and I have a section that is very much based on his style. The intro and the section before the key change is sort of a three against four feel. I thought, "Since the title is, 'I Got Rhythm,' why not mess with the rhythm?" I used the bridge as the intro with three against four. I had to write it out to get it in my head. [Laughter]

I really enjoyed how you mixed your jazz influence with the Merle Travis style in "I Got Rhythm." Lenny Breau used to mix styles a lot. It's a real attention getter.

Thanks, you know that extended ending I ripped right out of the Joe Pass book. I did some

transcriptions years ago where he kept the top note the same as he changed the chord below by descending in half steps. I thought, "How far can I go?" You know you can only go so far before it starts sounding corny. I actually got it to work

Pete with John Denver and band



descending chromatically all but the first interval almost all the way down the chromatic scale. I think the two-beat feel makes it a little more palatable for the average listener than if I had done it in a jazzier swing feel. One of the great things about Chet was that he put this nice two-beat feel to these great songs with great chord changes and made them very listenable for lots of people.

Steve Wonder's "Superstition" is a cool arrangement.

I was on a gig one night when a guy yelled out, "Superstition!" I explained why it couldn't be played on the guitar: "It's too hard to keep the bass line, horn line and melody going." When I left the gig a friend said, "Are you going to arrange it?" I said, "Oh Yeah!" [Laughter]

You're known for arranging pop tunes such as "Superstition" and "Josie."

They're band tracks that have complex parts that most of the time are hooks that have to be part of the arrangement but not necessarily easy or seemingly possible. How do you approach arranging something like that?

I don't look for tunes but I try to keep an open mind and let the tune reveal itself to me. I love a good bass line and of course I love a great melody and harmony but a groove is essential. Several people have asked me to arrange another Steely Dan tune but I haven't found one that has hit me the way "Josie" did. Maybe it's not the right time or I haven't discovered the tune. Tunes like the Jackson Five's "I Want You Back" are tunes from my childhood. It has this great descending bass line through it that's just too cool not to try! It's actually the hardest thing I play. The thumb work is very difficult. When I recorded it on my *Naked Pop* CD I was terrified. I practiced it a lot and to my surprise got it on the first take!

Pete with conductor Paul Gambill



I believe you have a slightly different take on solo playing because of your experience in the studio and playing with bands. You're very aware of the pulse and feel of the music.

Many musicians, not just guitarists, who only play solo are notorious for their lack of rhythm and ability to keep an even pulse when needed.

I think if you're a soloist and you're playing restaurant gigs or weddings, that's fine because they're not paying close attention, but if you're playing concerts you can lose the audience if you have a tendency to rush or drag. They don't know why, but if they can't clap their hands in time or sway in their seat, it can get confusing. Lots of solo players have no idea about that, no clue. A metronome or a drum machine can be your best friend.



Some people are under the impression that once they reach a certain level they can quit using the metronome, yet the best musicians I know use one often. Do you have any tips for working with a metronome?

It's important to remember there is a huge difference between playing with a metronome and playing with your metronome on. I see people all the time who say, "I practice with my metronome all the time," and their time is out to lunch! They're not stopping and saying, "You know what, for four minutes straight I'm going to

strum a G chord at 80 beats per minute and totally internalize it." It's painful, it's boring, but you'll be saying, "You know, I'm starting to feel it." I have no natural rhythm but I've talked to a lot of drummers and guitar players who have told me how to use a metronome. They'd say, "Play a slow country shuffle." A slow country shuffle is one of the hardest rhythms to keep because of the subdivision of the beat with the triplet feel. It's important to remember that a metronome is not just for building speed; it's also for internalizing the time. You have to be aware of the metronome. Ask yourself, "Am I behind the beat? Am I ahead of the beat?" Most people will be ahead of the beat. You have to be brutally honest with yourself.

Slow tempos seem to be the toughest for consistent placement of the beat.

Yeah, I think people tend to rush because they're afraid of the space.

I played one night with Bill Mize and as you know I like to play hot stuff so I played my tune "Brown Bomber" – the crowd loved it. I was feeling pretty good about myself, then Bill plays a slow Cherokee Indian prayer song and the crowd came to their feet! Here I was trying to show off chops and he got them with great musicality. Look, I get goose bumps just thinking about it! He wasn't afraid of the space. You can really pull an audience in

with space. I learned a big lesson.

You're a very experienced performer – I've been in your audience and I've also had the pleasure of playing a show with you. You always seem in control and never nervous.

On occasion I get the jitters but when I do I close my eyes and say, "Pete, you're in your living room." I don't get nervous in my living room. [Laughter] I also feel a responsibility to the audience, they paid good money and deserve a good performance, and it's not about me. I tell stories and cut-up quite a bit. I want them to leave feeling good about the whole experience. To tell you the truth, when I see solo guitarists that just sit and play I get bored. I want more from that person and the audience deserves it.



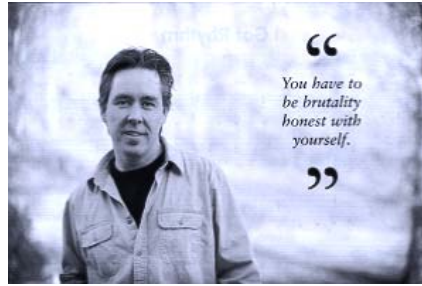
Tell me about your Homespun DVDs.

I currently have four volumes. I have two volumes on the music of John Denver; one on the art of practicing that helps make

better use of your time, it's filled with ideas; and I have another volume titled *Solo Arrangements For Acoustic Guitar*. I recently filmed two new volumes – a third volume of John Denver material and another with the working title, *Essential Exercises For Fingerstyle Guitar*.

I understand you're now renting your studio out as well as yourself as a producer.

Yes, I'm giving the artist two days of recording and a third day of editing and mixing. I think



it's a unique opportunity for guitarists to record in a great little studio, in a nice surrounding without the pressures of a studio where you're watching the clock. The service also includes my time as engineer as well as producer.

Anyone interested can read detailed information about the studio and contact me at www.petehuttlinger.com.

Though you've dedicated years to your music, I know you're like me – a new chord voicing or a new arrangement can turn us into a six-year old at Christmas.

For me music wasn't something I wanted to do, it was something I wanted to discover. The joy music brings me is definitely what gets me through life.