

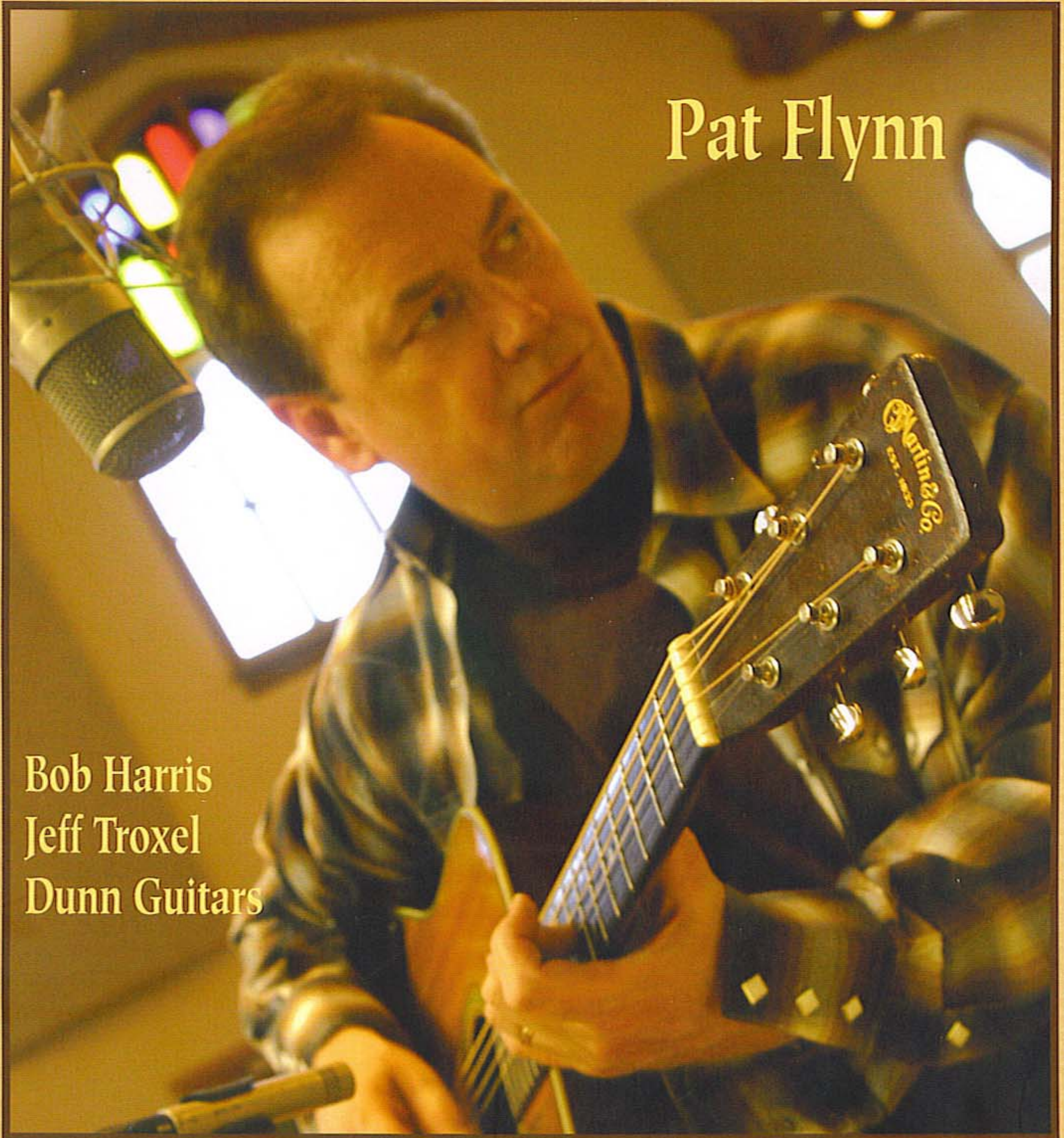
\$5.00



Flatpicking Guitar

Magazine

Volume 8, Number 5 July/August 2004



Pat Flynn

Bob Harris
Jeff Troxel
Dunn Guitars



Pat Flynn

Notes From The Edge

Unless you spent the eighties heavily sedated or working with the Peace Corps in Botswana, you know that the acoustic guitarist who dominated that decade was the first flatpicker to come not from a traditional bluegrass background, but from a wildly diverse group of music sources that included the Beatles, L.A.-based rock superstars like the Doors and Buffalo Springfield, and Bakersfield Nash-Vegas alt-country artists like the Flying Burrito Brothers and Buck Owens, to name a few.

It's no mere chance that Pat Flynn won *Frets* magazine's National Readers Poll for flatpicking guitarist of the year five years running. The musical voice he brought to flatpicking, while as clear and true to its roots as the down-home sensibilities of Doc Watson and Norman Blake were to theirs, ignited a literal firestorm among guitarists who heard the first completely original sound in flatpicking since Tony Rice. Play-

ing with fellow musical free thinkers Sam Bush, Bela Fleck and John Cowan in New Grass Revival, Flynn's rock and roll attitude and utterly distinctive licks filled with unique open-string intervals and stirring string bends took flatpicking to an entirely new level, and spurred an entire generation of flatpickers to look at their music as more than a rehashing of "Blackberry Blossom" or "Black Mountain Rag."

His influence, however, was much broader than acoustic flatpicking, and his soulful, thrill-seeking style showed acoustic guitarists in fields such as rock and new country how to add a vibrancy and energy to their solos that had never before been imagined. Once his days with NGR were behind him, Pat exerted a heavy influence on the Nashville scene as a producer and

Written by David McCarty

session player. He's been a session guitarist on over 300 CD projects, including 26 gold/platinum records with a wide array of top artists. Included in Pat's work in the studio are several CMA and Grammy Award-winning projects, the latest being Randy Travis' *Rise and Shine* CD and Lee Anne Womack's *I Hope You Dance*. Pat also wrote and performed on Garth Brook's monster hit single, "Do What You Gotta Do."

Pat's first solo CD project, *reQuest*, is now available from www.echomusic.com. Appearing with Pat on this project are Bela Fleck, John Cowan, Rob Ickes, Stuart Duncan, Jim Hoke, Buddy Greene and others. Pat will be doing many performance dates this year, partnering with artists such as John Cowan, Darrell Scott, Buddy Greene, Tim O'Brien, Stuart Duncan and others at festivals and showcase stages.

A native Southern Californian, Pat was part of the 60s music scene we all romanti-

cized. He saw the Beatles, and still has the \$6 ticket stub to the show! His local bands were the Beach Boys, Jan and Dean and the band that eventually became the Turtles. A virtual prodigy, Pat started playing guitar early on, and by the time he was in high school was doing session work in Hollywood, even recording in the same studio legendary producer Phil Spector used for his classic hits. He recorded and played extensively, covering country & western, rock, blues, folk, Dixieland, swing, big band jazz "Just about everything except classical and modern jazz," he tells *FGM*.

One of the most thoughtful and intelligent flatpickers around, he once told *Frets* that he used his off time during NGR tours to visit museums and libraries in the towns where they played and used that cultural exposure to help develop new song concepts Pat generously gave *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* a tremendous amount of time, answering a broad array of questions about his life, musical influence and career with the same insight and intensity he brings to everything he does.

What was the 60s musical scene like in Southern California for you?

Being in California, there was always someone to go see, somebody to meet, something to learn. I recall taking naps in the afternoon so I could go down to the "after hours" country music clubs in L.A. from 3 a.m. until dawn. Being underage, it was the only time I could come in the clubs, as no liquor was served. All the great local players would get off their club jobs at 2 a.m. and come down to these places to play until the sun came up. At that time and place, it was a renaissance period in music, I think—electric connections everywhere. The Byrds, the Buffalo Springfield, the Doors were all house bands in clubs around the Sunset Strip. The Ash Grove and McCabe's featured people like Doc Watson, the Dillard's, the Kentucky Colonels, Taj Mahal (with his amazing guitarist Jesse Ed Davis), Ry Cooder, etc. The Troubadour had new acts like RFD (who changed their name to Pogo, then Poco), the Earl Scruggs Revue, Neil Young, a local banjo-playing comedian named Steve Martin, and Jackson Browne (then an unknown opening act for Linda Ronstadt, whose back-up band would become the Eagles). The early rock festivals afforded me the chance to see Hendrix, Creedence Clearwater, Janis Joplin, Three Dog Night, the Rascals and on and on. I got a seat up close to see everyone from the

Beatles, Buck Owens with Don Rich and the Buckeroos, to Buddy Rich's big band, to (jazzers) Lenny Breau and Tommy Tedesco, to Gram Parsons and Emmy Lou Harris and everyone in-between.

How did this affect your development as a musician? Was it hard to focus on one area, or did everything sort of merge together for you? How did you begin to find your own musical voice?

At some point, I started to develop, musically, a more distinct personality. The formation of my particular musical personality started, as I said, from indiscriminate listening, experimenting, playing constantly, and paying attention. Bob Dylan was a turning point for me, as he was with so many. I think of him, in retrospect, as a religious figure to me. He was able to fully articulate musically what I was barely aware of. He embodied a rock attitude, with deep folk and blues roots, and his razor-sharp lyrics burned away anything else vying for my attention. His recordings had an effect on me like that of a conversion experience.

Here's a picture of where I was: Remember the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*? The lead character, Richard Dreyfus, had an idea in his mind (that was planted by the visitors) but couldn't figure out what it meant. So he took anything at hand, mud or clay or food or whatever, and kept making

all sorts of models of a mountain, not knowing why, until he figured out where he was supposed to go. That was me! I had a musical model in mind, but I thought it didn't exist. It was acoustic in nature, with bluegrass, folk and blues roots. But it incorporated rock and world rhythms and a strong drive. It had to feature dense, non-traditional lyrics, and lots of musical improvisation. Basically, true to my California experience, it had to incorporate all the best elements of the wide variety of styles that I loved, and do so in a way that made sense. I was so consumed with this vision, I left town to find some place to work on it. I left California for Aspen, Colorado, because I knew a couple of musicians there and I had a feeling that that was the right place to go. Of course, I didn't really know why I went there, but I soon found out why. I saw a band named New Grass Revival and—in a moment—I knew who I was and where I needed to be.

So joining NGR was really a turning point for you.

Absolutely. The ten years with the band have been pretty well documented. We played all over the country, all over the world. We had a record deal, did TV, radio shows and videos, were nominated for many awards (and won some) and continued to gain momentum until the end. The fact that



Pat Flynn teaching at Steve Kaufman's first flatpicking camp, 1996



all our studio recordings are still in print says a lot. We made a decision to disband in mid-1989, but to finish out the year. We did our last show New Year's Eve 1989 at the Oakland Coliseum in California, opening for Bonnie Raitt and the Grateful Dead. It was the end of the year (obviously), the end of the decade, and the end of the band, all in one night!

So what did you do after that?

I went home to Nashville and had some thinking to do. Everyone else in the band seemed to want to catch the next bus out of town. I don't think I could have done that, gone out on the road with some new group, if you had a gun on me. For better or for worse, the three people that I went through so much with were the only band that I was interested in being with. The next several years I did what I most needed to do. My wife and I found a house and three children came along. The children served to remind me how self-absorbed I had been for so long, and they helped me get over that quickly! I experienced a deep crisis of conscience as I reflected on the past many years and made a conscious decision to accept the authority of Christ in my life. My life has not been the same since, and it permeates all of who I am and what I do. I returned to school, after many years, and finished

an undergraduate degree in psychology. The degree required me to work in the community doing mental health and drug and alcohol prevention programs. It was hard work, but good for me. My work as a studio musician allowed me stay home and pursue my education. Psychology left me wanting to comprehend a bigger picture, and I completed a Masters Degree in Biblical Studies (Pat graduated Summa Cum Laude from David Lipscomb University in 1994). Since that time I've kept my hand in community service work and ministry, specifically in the areas of faith and values in the public square. I've also encountered many wonderful musicians who integrate their faith and values with their work, and I much admire artists like Rich

Mullins, Amy Grant, Mark Heard, David Wilcox and new friends like Buddy Greene and Michael Card.

So how has your career developed as musician during this time?

Over the last twenty years, from the latter part of my time with NGR to the present, I've been fortunate enough to work alongside Nashville's studio musicians, an elite group of virtuoso players, and hands-down the most wickedly funny people you'll ever meet. It has been an honor to be a part of that community. There have been some very successful projects along the way, and it's always fun to hear a record that you were a part of become a daily event on the radio. During the last few years, I've gotten the opportunity to produce some projects for artists that I admire, and it's a role that I loved immediately. As a producer, I can involve myself as a musician, an arranger and a writer, if need be, or just stay on the other side of the glass the whole time. It's very challenging to be in charge of the total picture, and not just the guitar parts, but it's been deeply satisfying and I hope to do more producing as opportunities arise.

How schooled are you musically, having done so much session work and pursued so many different styles?

Early on, I taught myself theory and

harmony, took some rudimentary lessons, and learned from music books, especially the mail-order curriculum from Berklee in Boston. I sought out a symphony conductor to take private lessons in sight-reading and theory, and attended seminars run by studio musicians, which later evolved into the Guitar Institute of Technology (GIT). I'm still learning, of course!

Are you still using the D-28 that was your main axe with New Grass Revival? What is it and how did you acquire it?

Yes, I'm still using a D-28. I have a trunk of guitars for studio work, but the guitar I had in New Grass, my 1949 D-28, is still my primary guitar. I got it from Gary Burnett in Asheville, NC, who always had several good guitars on hand at his house. It's an unusual Martin; they tend to vary from guitar to guitar. This one's not boomy or indistinct on the bottom end like so many can be. It has a very clear low end, which makes it a wonderful recording guitar because the engineer doesn't have to try to EQ out the boominess in the bass. It's also a very versatile guitar. It seems to be able to apply itself to a variety of music styles. Of all the guitars I have owned, it's the most well-rounded. Another thing I like is that when you go up the neck, the sound doesn't thin out. It stays strong, which is a rare quality in any guitar. The tone stays thick on the high notes. One thing I do is use a light gauge set, but substitute a .013 and .017 for the E and B strings to keep it strong in the high registers.

Is the guitar basically stock?

I think the bridge was replaced when Kim Walker he worked on it for me. I think he replaced the bridge because it was splintering. He didn't shave the braces, but took just a little bit off very, very gently to get the guitar to open up after it had a neck reset. I also changed the tuning gears and got a set of more accurate gears on it.

You've been a pioneer in developing ways to amplify an acoustic guitar while retaining the basic acoustic sound. Can you talk about that and explain what your current set-up is?

I went to Martin in the 80s, and they had a prototype of the very first Thinline pickup. So as far as I know, I was the first guitarist to ever use one on stage. Larry Fishman was working with Martin, and I got the first prototype that I know of. There wasn't anything else out there. I told Martin I wanted

to keep the acoustic sound, but amplify it. I tell you, our experiments amplifying our instruments with New Grass were not pretty in the beginning. Using piezo pickups, the harder you hit the guitar, the more signal distortion you get. And since my style was aggressive, that caused many problems.

Then we started trying to experiment with mics in the guitar, but there was no way to blend the signals with a pickup. We tried lavalier mics, but they would break up and distort. One day Bela and I read through a magazine that said the ECM 90 could be used for micing a snare drum. Bela and I both put that mic in our instruments and use them to this day. It was wonderful; a very flat sound, dry. We experimented with location, and I wound up putting it recessed in the soundhole so the air wouldn't hit it, but would go right by it. Richard Battaglia designed the system that was the first to blend mic and pickup signals in one rack-mounted unit. We could take a stereo cord from the guitar, separate the mic and pickup signals, do separate EQ on them, then blend the two together or send out either one separately. I still use the one he made for me.

Last year, I discovered a wonderful thing, the PreSonus Acousti-Q preamp. Honestly, a lot of times now I just use the guitar and that unit. I get a great sound out of it. I still use an exterior mic if I can, but this is an honest sound. There's no feedback whatsoever, and it sounds like my guitar. I can't say enough about what they've done. I've used Lloyd Baggs' pickups over the years and like them a lot, but right now I'm using the Fishman Matrix pickup, which is fine, blended with the ECM 90 mic.

What strings, picks, capo? What's your action like?

I am a very avid endorser of John Pearse acoustic guitar strings. They've been wonderful to me over the years. I've handed out a lot of sets of strings for guitarists to try, and I've never had anyone say they didn't like them. They seem to last longer, although my hands are not that acidic. I use phosphor bronze because they work best on my D-28. The pick is whatever the song requires. It depends on what I'm playing. I get certain sounds with thinner or thicker picks. Like a lot of flatpickers, I went through a phase where I had to have tortoise shell. I do not have a certain brand, but I usually use a medium-heavy pick, like a .86. When I'm in the studio, I will experiment with different picks all the time.

What's your guitar setup like?

It's not real low. I guess it would be on the high side, but not extremely. It's not so high that it sharpens the note when you fret it. I hit the guitar fairly hard, so a low setting would buzz on me. My D-28 requires a firm hand; it's not an easy guitar to play. It has a pretty chunky neck. I have to stay in shape to play it.

You're such an original voice on acoustic guitar; you don't sound like you're influenced overly by anyone who came before you in flatpicking. How did you develop your own style? Was it a deliberate effort on your part?

I'd like to say that, but the truth is everybody copies. I've heard people say they don't listen to other guitarists, that they just do their own thing. I think that's a lot of smoke. We copy to learn. It's not like a sax player who's reading sheet music from day one. Guitar players learn a chord, or a lick here or there, and build on that. I never was interested in being a disciple of anyone in particular, I was copying everyone. John Hartford once said, "Style is someone's limitations." If there's anything about the genesis of my style, it was struggling to play what was difficult for me. When I started playing bluegrass, the speed and dexterity of people like Doc Watson, Dan Crary, and Clarence White really challenged me. It was hard for me to play without my wrist locking up. So I sort of came across all these pull-offs and hammers and open string things because they were a way to keep the tempo up, and a way around straight flatpicking. So, I came upon this thing I do accidentally. Later on, I became more adept at straight flatpicking. But at time I was learning it, I was just trying to get the job done.

The other thing that influenced me is that I have always listened to other instruments. I love electric guitar, chromatic banjo, fiddle and mandolin, steel guitar, lap steel, sax,

clarinet, harmonica...whatever. I also played a lot of styles of music. I loved playing rock and blues and jazz and swing, so when I came to bluegrass and sort of focused more on acoustic music, all that stuff was in me. I soaked up a lot over time. There's nothing wrong being a guitar-o-phile. I just think that you need to listen to all kinds of things and learn to access all that is available.

Do you feel that this originality in your playing was what made you so popular right from the start? You seemed to catch everyone's ear immediately and make a deep impression musically.

I don't know. I never really felt that at the time. When I came onto people's radar screen with NGR, I was aware of the giants out there, both among the old and new players. I was just hoping to earn a seat at the table. For a long time, I constantly practiced and tried all sorts of approaches, and it took a long time. I never felt I burst fully formed onto the scene. I recall meeting and hearing so many wonderful players, I knew my work was cut out for me. Also, I was very inspired and motivated by the other three people I was in a band with, so I worked hard to have something original to contribute. Since that time, I've learned a lot working in Nashville. Applying myself to studio work has been a great experience for me. I'm a better player



now, because of the discipline and demands of that job. Studio work is a tough room! There's only a very small number of people who make a living doing it.

One thing that has drawn a lot of attention is the inclusion of lots of non-traditional elements in your playing—big intervals using open strings, lots of deep bluesy bends, a powerful rhythmic drive even in your soloing. Can you talk about what you think makes your playing so distinctive and how you develop a solo? I know that's a hard process to describe.

It is a hard process to describe. I never thought about it in detail until I did a few guitar seminars (Pat will be an instructor at the Kaufman Kamp again this year). It's only because people asked me these questions that I looked at my own playing for the first time and tried to take it apart. I realized it was pretty intuitive. I can be pragmatic and take it apart and analyze it, but what it

comes down to, is about being a good conversationalist. When you walk up to talk to someone you don't think to yourself "now make sure you don't dangle a participle, or use an incorrect adverb here, and let's see...what adjective should I use?" You did that work in fifth grade English class! At some point you developed the ability to just open your mouth and simply converse. That's where I am now, having done all the foundational work. I put my guitar on, find my place in the music I'm playing, and I just express myself. It's fluid and spontaneous. So that's the answer: it's conversational.

In a recording studio, I have to assimilate a lot in a compressed time frame, and come up with something that will work. The job is: what can you come up with in a few minutes that's not only going to elevate and lift that song, but also be something distinctive. I do a lot of thinking quickly. What style is the song, what is the feel, the rhythm, the melody? I can be an impressionistic

painter in my playing, but I start with the style, what does the singer sound like, what are the lyrics saying, what's the bass line? I put all that together fairly quickly, then I can start to improvise a part. I need my mind to stay open and relaxed and find some interesting things to jump off on; find some connections. My ears are pretty honed, so I can hear what the piece requires, then I can find a frame of reference, whether highly structured or free form.

How much do you employ unusual right-hand picking techniques? Is it mostly playing a DUD pattern, or do you incorporate a lot of sweeps, rest strokes and cross-picking?

I think the approach can be different things. I can do straight DUD or straight crosspicking, or use a pick and fingers or play with all fingers. When I was in LA, where I first began doing sessions, I noticed a guy playing acoustic guitar with a pick

FLATPICKING 2003

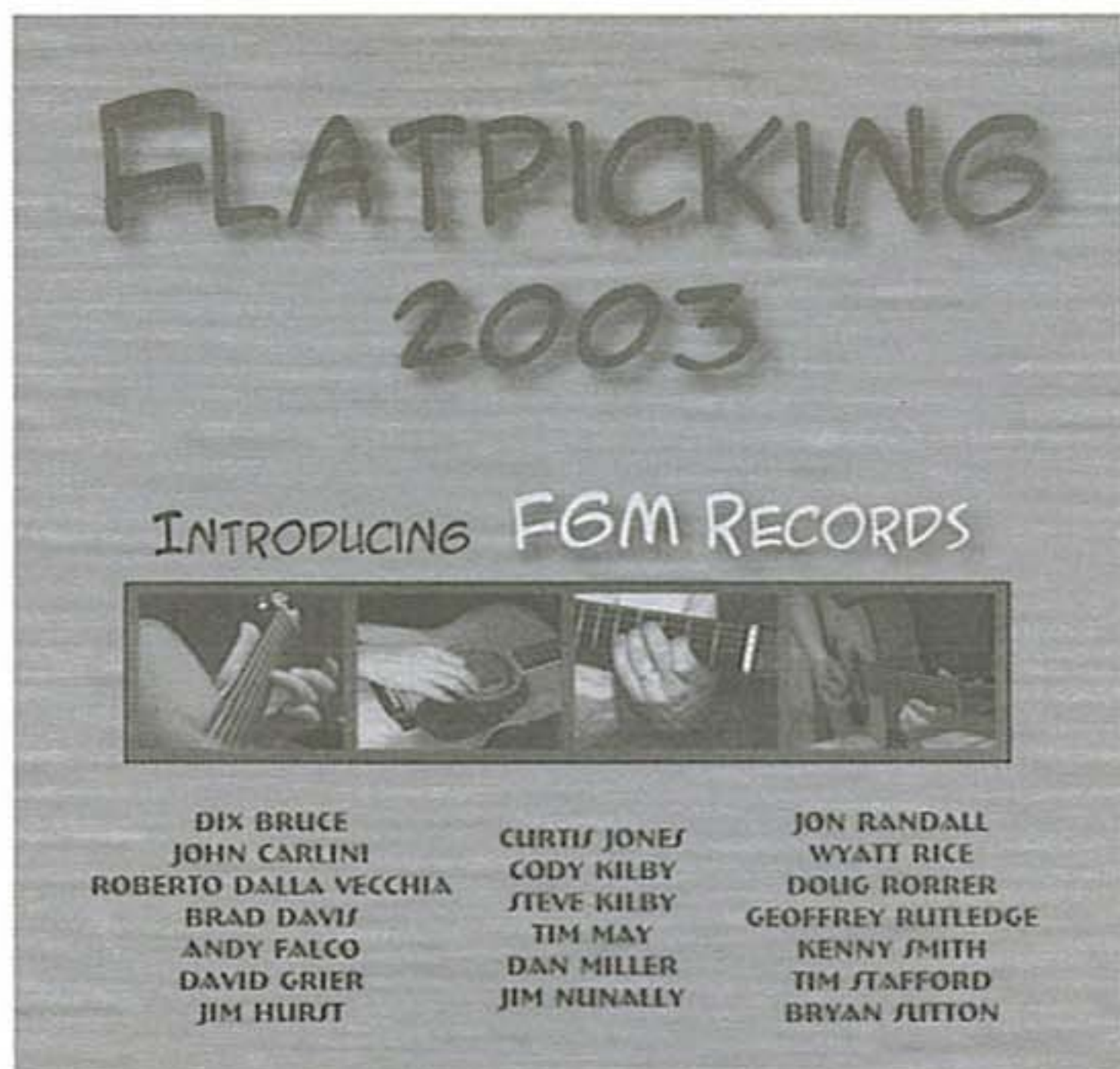
Featuring:

DIX BRUCE
JOHN CARLINI
ROBERTO DALLA VECCHIA
BRAD DAVIS
ANDY FALCO
DAVID GRIER
JIM HURST

CURTIS JONES
CODY KILBY
STEVE KILBY
TIM MAY
DAN MILLER
JIM NUNALLY

JON RANDALL
WYATT RICE
DOUG RORRER
GEOFFREY RUTLEDGE
KENNY SMITH
TIM STAFFORD
BRYAN SUTTON

To Order
800-413-8296



www.FGMRecords.com

Special Offer:
Order Any
FGM Records
Release and
get a FREE copy
of *Flatpicking
2003!* Mention
this ad when
you call 800-
413-8296.

Great CDs by:
Brad Davis
John Carlini
John Jorgenson
Tim Stafford
Dix Bruce &
Jim Nunally
Jon Randall
and more!

**Plus Concert
DVDs featuring:**
David Grier
Wyatt Rice
Kenny Smith
Tim Stafford
Jim Hurst
Bryan Sutton

