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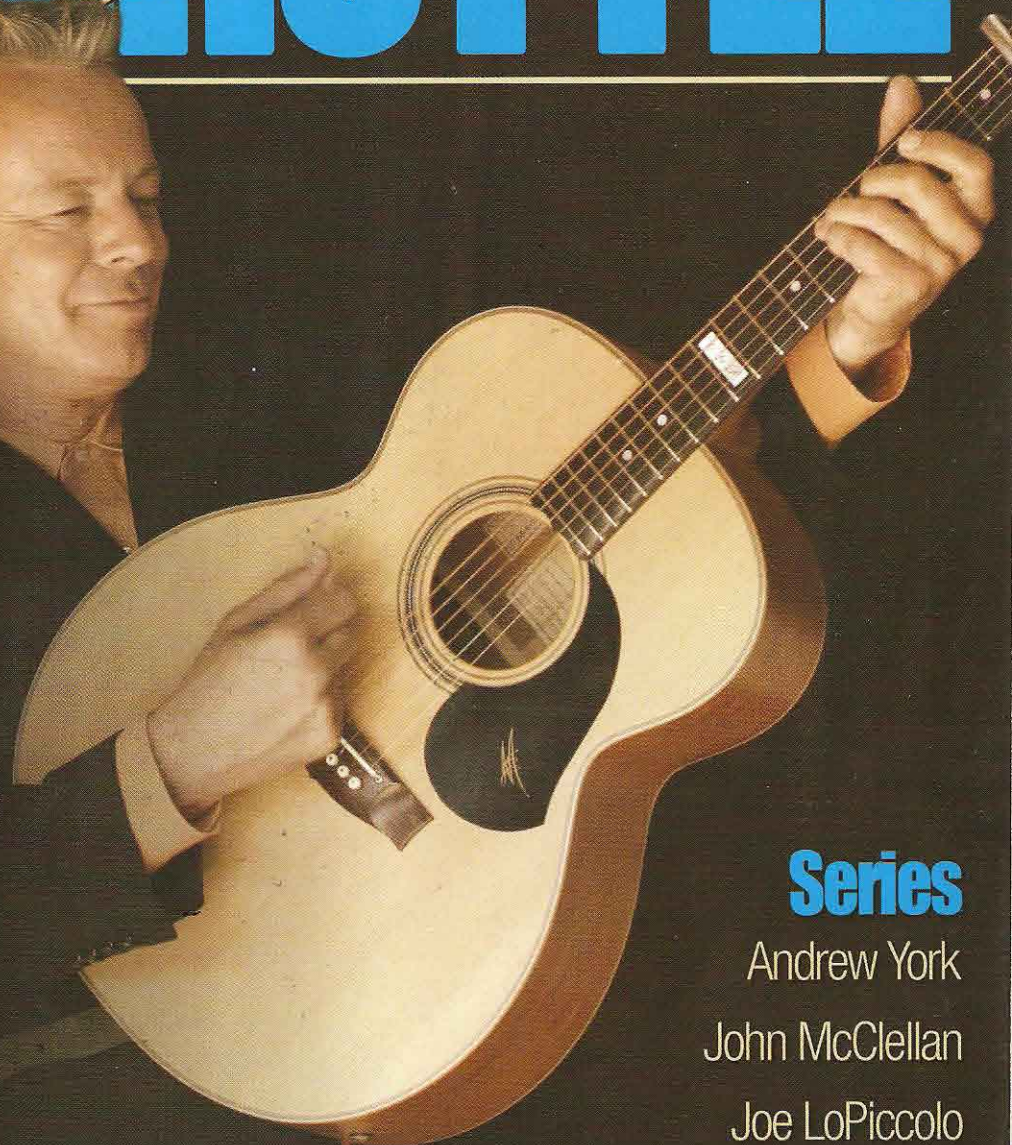
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TIM THOMPSON HIDDEN GIANT

In the summer of '06 I befriended Tim Thompson after hearing him on a Nashville jazz station. I thought, "Who in the world is that!" I was surprised when they said it was Tim Thompson from Nashville. I went home and found his website and to my good fortune, his phone number. It was even more of a surprise to discover that he lived less than 20 minutes from my home and that he has resided in Nashville for 14 of my 18 years here! That's Nashville for you. "Hidden Giant" in Tim Thompson's case, is certainly more than the name of his production company.

You're now putting your focus on studio work and your solo career, but originally you came to Nashville to write songs. That's right, I love writing lyrics. I used to visit Nashville to get a feel of the town and the business. Eventually we moved here and for the first five years I put all of my time into writing and set my guitar on the back burner. I wrote for a small music publisher for about three years. Toward the end of that stint, after a lot of prodding from my wife, I recorded a solo instrumental guitar Christmas record. One of my arrangements from that CD, "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen," made it onto the soundtrack, with me as one of the artists, of *Casper's Haunted Christmas*. I guess that was one of the seeds that got me back into playing my guitar. After that, I cracked open the *Real Book* and started playing standards again. I had forgotten how much I love playing that kind of music. I've recorded four more CDs since. Now

I make my living with a combination of doing session work, playing on lots of demos and independent records, live performances and guitar workshops out of town. I also have a fun little jazz trio, The Circus, which performs mostly in Nashville and the surrounding area.

You have a strong jazz influence but you grew up playing in rock bands. How did you get interested in jazz? My older brother Denny played jazz guitar and every Christmas and birth-

day he'd buy me guitar records by guys like Pat Martino, Barney Kessel and Joe Pass. The things that really attracted me to jazz are the chord changes, the melodies and the solos, and how those guys reflected the chord changes in their improvising. I studied music theory in high school and later on jazz seemed like the natural progression for me. However, because of my rock background, I gravitate

towards using rock, pop and R&B grooves over the same jazz standards that everyone plays. The first instruments I played were piano, then trombone, and finally I discovered guitar.

You had a rare opportunity in your early 20s to study jazz with the pianist Manfredo Fest. Tell me about him and how that happened. Manfredo came from Brazil. He played with Sergio Mendes and Brazil '66. He lived in the Saint Paul area and was a friend of my brother Denny. He was a great piano player. He was deaf in one ear yet he had perfect pitch! He died a few years ago [1936-1999]. He was really great with chords and had a great feel. I basically would bring my guitar and ask him how to approach soloing over a jazz tune. I'd bring him things like "Seven Steps to Heaven," "There Is No Greater Love" and "Angel Eyes." He knew every tune, I never stumped him. He'd tell me how to think about the tune and how to think about groups of chords and their relationships. I guess the main thing I learned from Manfredo was how to re-harmonize a song. He'd take a tune and play variations of chord melodies and explain how he soloed over the changes. Applying it to guitar, or any other instrument for that matter, requires some rearranging of the notes (voicings) but harmony is harmony and I learned a lot from him.

Wally Walstad was a big influence as well. He did drywall taping for a living but he was one of the best jazz guitar players I'd heard! I'd ask him a question and he'd take off explaining faster than I could keep up. I'd have to stop him and say, "Just show me that one spot." I got together with him every couple months. That was a real growing time for me.

Did he have a theoretical approach to what he showed you? Yes, well, kind of. He knew what he was playing and how everything fit together but sometimes he would play things that didn't always make musical sense but they sounded great, so it was a good lesson in not over-analyzing things.

"Hey turn it down! My mom doesn't like Ted Nugent!" My mom came into the room and said, "I do too like Ted Nugent!"

T



by **BILL PIBURN**

You have a unique way of thinking through the harmony as you solo. Can you describe this in simple terms? I think what you're referring to is how I approach a jazz tune. When I first started playing jazz, some of the changes would go by and the keys would change so fast, I'd get overwhelmed and feel like I was being pushed around by the song. I'll try to be brief. When chords are going by, to my ear, there are one or two notes that are dominant. For example, a progression like I, vi, ii, V7 in C would be C, A-, D-, G7. Those chords all fall into a C major scale naturally so you can bang around in C while these chords are going by and you'll probably be okay. But if you change the progression to C, A7, D7, G7 then you have a couple of odd ball notes (the 3rd of A7 and the 3rd of D7) that are not in C. Typically A7 is the V7 chord of D and D7 is the V7 chord of G, so now you have three different keys to worry about while you're soloing over this new progression. That's a lot to keep track of. The way I'll look at it – and this may be nothing new to a lot of players – is to focus on one note that keeps my solo

hanging with the changes. When A7 comes around I'll play a #1 (C#: Major 3rd of the A7 chord), and when D7 shows up, I play a b5 (F#: Major 3rd of the D7 chord). I'm thinking about one key and just adding notes to it. After a while, by just focusing on that one note, you'll start to see the entire chord from that point. That's the simplified version.

You know a lot of standard jazz tunes but for someone new to jazz, which tunes would you say are important to learn that would help one understand how to play through changes that are commonly found? Some of my favorites are, and this will be a very short list: "Stella By Starlight," "There Is No Greater Love," "Invitation," "How Insensitive." There are more but there's not enough room. Also, anything by Antonio Jobim and Cole Porter.

One of the things that is unique about your jazz playing is that you play fingerstyle. Have you

always played fingerstyle? No, I really just started playing fingerstyle about seven years ago. But I did always use my fingers in conjunction with the flatpick.

How did you go from playing with a flatpick to fingerstyle with nails and a thumbpick? Playing fingerstyle for me really came out of songwriting. One thing led to another and I found myself doing the single lines fingerstyle. I wore my nails down and eventually started using acrylic nails as well as a thumbpick.

Your technique of playing single lines with the thumbpick is a little different than say, what Chet Atkins did. Yeah, I alternate my fingers in a pattern of p-i-p-m, etc. I also move my wrist a little when I play, it's hard to describe but it's very natural for me.

Does the basic pattern of p-i-p-m stay consistent no matter what string it is being played on? Yes, pretty much; that is what I go for. A big part of why I alternate like that is not for speed, but comfort. I had tendinitis and I was just trying to find ways to play and chase the pain away. I started working with that pattern and after about half an hour it started to smooth out. I thought to myself, "This could work."

Do you see yourself primarily as a jazz player? No, but I guess it's my first love when it comes to guitar.

Tell me about your other influences. Wow! There are a lot of them but the people that always come to mind when I'm asked are: Pat Martino, Joe Pass, Wes Montgomery, John McLaughlin, John Scofield, Chet Atkins, Ritchie Blackmore, Jeff Beck, and Larry Carlton.

You play a Taylor T5. Tell me about this guitar. It's become my main live guitar. I use it solo and a lot with my jazz trio. I love the T5 because it plays easy

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TIM THOMPSON **HIDDEN
GIANT**

like an electric guitar but responds like an acoustic guitar. I can still get that acoustic snap of the wood but I'm not physically fighting with the guitar. Some of the stuff I play requires some long stretches [on the left hand] and on a regular acoustic guitar with heavier strings that can be physically challenging and painful. I like steel strings so the T5 is a great instrument for me.

You use a device called a Boomerang. Tell me about that. The Boomerang is a phrase sampler and it allows me to record up to four minutes of my guitar and then instantly loop it. I originally bought it as a practice tool to play over jazz changes but I started incorporating it into my live performances. I use it in about a third of my solo guitar repertoire. I can record two loops and go back and forth between them as well as stack on top of them. I usually record the basic changes in the first loop, then I'll record a second loop of the changes playing single notes, then solo over both of them. It's become the second most important machine in my life, second only to my espresso maker [laughs].

Do you ever use the Boomerang when recording? I've used it on some recordings but only as a reverse delay and only with a band, not solo. It has a switch that plays the loop in reverse so you can do some interesting things with it.

Tell me about the gear you use for solo, trio and electric band situations. I use an AER Compact 60 amp on live gigs. The main reason I bought the amp is because of the size. Other than the fact that it sounds great, it's tiny, light weight, and fits in a very small trunk. It's less critical playing solo but with a band, I can screw the amp onto the top of a mic stand and have it right at my ear where I can hear it.

My acoustic guitar's pedal board consists of a Boss digital reverb, a Boss digital tap tempo delay, a Keeley compressor, a Boss EQ, a MXR Bass Octave pedal, all powered by Voodoo Lab's Pedal Power, and of course the Boomerang. I'm always trying new toys, though.

When I'm playing with a band, I usually use my Line 6 Vetta head with the line out into the AER amp. The Vetta has a truckload of sounds and effects. I

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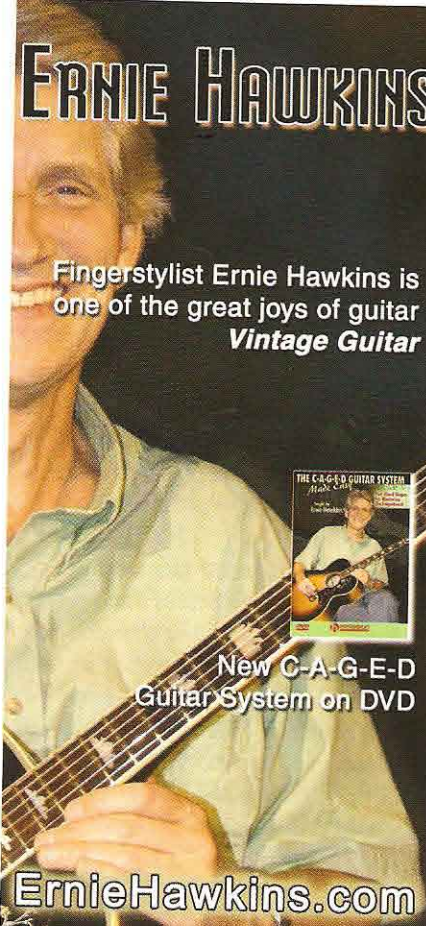
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go back and forth between my Zion Tele and the Taylor T5 when I'm with my trio. It kind of depends on the size of the venue. If I have to really crank up, I usually go for the Tele.

I love your arrangement of "The Flintstones." How did you come to arrange it and did you play it in a band setting before working up the solo arrangement? Thanks! The first time I ever played the song was solo so it didn't start out in a band situation. I was looking for some tunes to work up for guitar and a friend of mine gave me a CD with a bunch of TV themes. Looking at the song titles, "The Flintstones" jumped out. Everyone knows the tune so I started playing around with it and stumbled onto this goofy bass line. The tricky part was playing the melody at the same time. It took a while but now I can play it in my sleep, which I do on occasion. Sometimes it takes a while for my audience to figure out what I'm playing but once they get it, I notice a few smiles.

What is the history behind the name of your com-

pany Hidden Giant Music? I was trying to come up with a name for my music company that had some meaning to it. The place where I grew up in Northern Minnesota is called the *Mesabi* iron range. So I figured I'd find out what *Mesabi* means. I started with the encyclopedia and looked up the word and I found it right away. *Mesabi* is a Native American word for hidden giant, referring to the huge iron ore deposit in that region of the country. My home town is right in the middle of it. I think it's a great name and it has a good story behind it.

I know your mother was and is very supportive of your music. Yeah, growing up, one of us always had our rock band rehearsing at home and no matter how loud we played she never complained. I once asked her why and she said, "At least I always knew where you were." One time when one of the guys was playing a Ted Nugent record really loud I yelled at him: "Hey turn it down! My mom doesn't like Ted Nugent!" My mom came into the room and said, "I do too like Ted Nugent!" [Laughs.]

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