

JUS JAZZ GUITAR

www.justjazzguitar.com

US \$11.00

THE PUBLICATION FOR THE JAZZ GUITAR ENTHUSIAST

No. 81 • NOVEMBER 2014

**20TH
ANNIVERSARY
ISSUE**



MUSIC

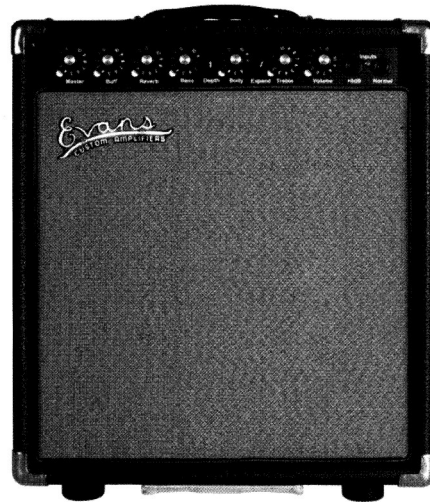
Autumn Leaves
I'm Getting Sentimental Over You
Greensleeves (2 versions)
Joy To The World
First Christmas
Lady Bird
Pickin' My Way

INTERVIEWS

Richard Smith
The Benedetto Amplifier
Luthier Theo Scharpach
Pete Smyser
Taylor Roberts
Bill Swick

REVIEW

Evans RE300 Amplifier



MEET BILL SWICK, GUITAR EDUCATOR

12-Time *Signature in the Schools*

GRAMMY Winner

2014 *Educator of the Year In Las Vegas*

By Robert Conti



Preface: In addition to a concert in past years, I've had the pleasure of conducting In Service Workshops for the teachers of Clark County, NV, and the students at LVA. After hearing the superb results of Bill's dedication and diligence in working with these young students, I felt the jazz guitar community should be made aware of his impressive accomplishments.

RC: Let's give the readers a bit of information as to where and how long have you've been teaching at your current location?

BS: I teach at the Las Vegas Academy of the Arts in downtown Las Vegas. Best known by the locals as LVA, this school building is the oldest high school in Las Vegas, built in 1931, located in downtown Las Vegas. The school became a Performing Arts Magnet School in 1993, modeled very closely after the famous LaGuardia High School in New York which inspired the movie "Fame." LVA is a free, public high school in which students must audition to be accepted. In 2002, I was hired to teach guitar full-time and also given the responsibility as Music Department Chair. We have twelve full-time music faculty and over 900 music majors enrolled in the school.

RC: How often do you see your students, and do they receive private lessons?

BS: I teach classroom guitar, with 32 guitar students in each class. We meet daily for 90 minutes, five days a week. I keep the same students for four years. At the

completion of their graduation, they have received over 1,100 hours of instruction time with me. I have three classes that I teach daily: each class is a different level of skill, level 1, 2 and 3. Students are placed in classes based on their skill level and experience.



RC: I've attended several of your concerts in past years, and I have to say, those kids are quite amazing. Your dedication to their success is clearly evident! How important is reading music in your program?

BS: Music reading is the core to the whole program. Students are instructed to learn to read music in multiple positions on the neck, complex rhythms, and extended ranges. Once students learn to read music, we can play most any style of music. We perform six concerts each school year, each with a theme, and a variety of music including classical, rock, jazz, blues, etc. Everything except the improvised solos is written.

RC: I read the Las Vegas Review Journal story about the LVA music department recently receiving its 12th GRAMMY Award. Tell the readers how your school was selected for this great award?

BS: The GRAMMY Foundation has been supportive of public school music education for many years. In the mid-1990's the GRAMMY Foundation began identifying outstanding high school music programs and rewarding them with recognition and cash prizes. The first step is to complete an application which may be found on their website <http://www.grammyintheschools.com>. The foundation is looking for schools that have a strong emphasis on music education, have a high percentage of students who are studying music, and have a variety of musical choices for their students. With over half of our student body studying music, twelve full-time music faculty, and a long list of "alternative music ensembles," LVA has

been able to get through the first tier of the application process each year we apply.



RC: Are there many high schools across the country applying for the GRAMMY?

BS: There are hundreds of high schools that apply. The first tier of the application narrows the selection process down to the top 40 schools. The next tier of the application requires creating a recording which is outlined by the foundation exactly what is included on the recording. The recordings are judged by a panel of judges selected by the foundation and the top scoring schools are selected for receiving the awards.

RC: 12 Signature GRAMMYs to LVA is certainly an impressive achievement. Is this common with other schools?

BS: LVA has received more Signature GRAMMYs than any high school in the U.S. To avoid having the same school win year after year, the foundation adopted guidelines that require a school to sit out a year after winning two years in a row. Recently, another rule was made, that requires any Magnet Performing Arts school that wins, to sit out one year before applying again.

This new rule will slow down the number of awards we may receive in the future. Under the current rules, by receiving this award, we must sit out one year before applying again.

RC: In 2005, the GRAMMY Foundation teamed up with the Gibson Foundation, and gave out an award for the most outstanding high school guitar programs in the U.S. Is it true that your program at LVA received the first award?

BS: Yes, it is. In 2005, the Gibson Foundation identified the top 3 high school guitar programs in the U.S., and the LVA guitar program was one of the top three to receive this award. It was a one-time award and came with a \$5,000 cash prize. I am particularly proud of this award because it was given directly to the guitar program.

R.C: You should be very proud, as that is a major recognition for a high school guitar program. Are there other awards in which the readers might have interest?

BS: *DownBeat Magazine* gives out Student Awards each year in the spring. The LVA Guitar Program has received four *DownBeat Magazine* awards, one for *Best Classical Soloist*, two for *Best Classical Ensemble*, and the most recent for *Best Latin Ensemble*.

R.C: Clearly, you have created an outstanding guitar program at LVA. Please tell the readers about your recent award for the 2014 Educator of the Year. Quite an impressive accomplishment, as I believe there are over 18,000 teachers in Clark County, NV.

B.S: You are correct. With over 18,000 teachers in Clark County, to have been selected as the teacher of the year was quite an overwhelming honor.

R.C: When I think “Educator of the Year,” I imagine a math or science teacher winning. How common is it for a guitar teacher to win this award?

B.S: According to some research, I believe I’m the first guitar teacher and the first fine arts teacher of any kind to have been cited and recognized for an award at this level. On the day I received the award, I met the panel of judges who made the final decision. The panel narrowed it down to 5 finalists and at a special luncheon, the finalists were each recognized with a plaque and then the winner was named and given a personalized trophy. I thanked the panelist profusely for selecting a fine arts teacher.

R.C: Please tell the readers about the *Swickster* guitar that you designed. Did that play a role in receiving the Educator of the Year award?

B.S: Yes, the guitar neck that I designed is considered innovative in education. The neck is marked to display the black and white keys of the piano making it very visible for the player to see the placement of the diatonic notes in the key of C. This expedites the learning process of scales, chords, position playing, improvisation, etc. It's much like having a guitar on training wheels.



Bill Swick, Bob Conti & Rob Goldsmith

R.C: How can someone find one of your guitars?

B.S: There are available at www.Swickster.com.

R.C: Bill, after racking up such an impressive list of awards, what's next on your agenda?

B.S: Truthfully speaking, I'm not sure. One of the major rewards of having an award-winning guitar program at this performing arts high school in Las Vegas, is the many world-class guitarists that visit and work with our students. In addition to your (Robert Conti) workshops, teacher in-service seminars, and concert performances at LVA, we have attracted a host other world-class guitarists including Wolf Marshall, Chris Buzzelli, Jack Peterson, Mike Christiansen, Corey Christiansen, David Tanenbaum, Steve Trovato, Richard Smith, Martha Masters, Michael Chapdelaine, Ricardo Cobo, Jerry Snyder, Jeff Linsky, Peppino D'Agostino and many other notable players.

Having a program that attracts talent like the above referenced guitarists is the real payoff. When 8th graders are contemplating auditioning for LVA, they are made aware that one of the benefits of attending LVA is the exposure to the many professionals who walk the halls.

R.C: Is LVA the only high school with a guitar program in Las Vegas?

B.S: No, there are actually 62 public schools in Clark

County with more than 5,700 students enrolled in their guitar classes. About half of the schools are middle schools and the other half are high schools. Each class has approximately 30 students, and each class must be taught by a state licensed, college accredited music teacher.

R.C: Please tell the readers what qualifies a guitar teacher to teach in a public school?

B.S: It is beneficial to have a Bachelor of Music Education degree from an accredited school, along with a state teacher's license. Unfortunately, not all of our guitar teachers are great guitar players, but they are band, choir and orchestra teachers who meet the state qualifications to be in the classroom, and they also need to teach guitar classes to fill their schedules.

R.C: Does this problem exist in states other than Nevada?

B.S: Actually, this is a problem throughout the United States, as West Virginia, Utah and New Mexico, were some of the first states to offer guitar in public schools, and that was more than thirty years ago. Now, almost every state is offering guitar in schools, and every state is challenged with the task of finding qualified guitar teachers. Far too few colleges and universities are graduating guitar majors with music education degrees.

NOTE: Anyone who wants to learn more about the guitar programs in the Clark County School District and/or additional information about the Las Vegas Academy of the Arts may contact Bill Swick at BillSwick@msn.com.

R.C. Bill, in behalf of *Just Jazz Guitar Magazine* and its readers, I extend many thanks for this insightful interview. Much good luck and continued success in your endeavors.



Larry Newcomb and Bucky Pizarelli