

Fred Fried - Biography

7-string jazz guitarist Fred Fried was born December 2, 1948 in Brooklyn, New York. "My parents didn't play any instruments," he states, " but my mother had a beautiful singing voice and we always had records around the house."

As a kid Fred enjoyed everything from early rock and roll to show tunes. He remembers listening to cast albums of Oklahoma, South Pacific and West Side Story. He loved Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue and pretended to conduct the orchestra in front of the record player. In retrospect, Fred notes that it was very beneficial to have loved different kinds of music before he became involved with the guitar. "That way," he states, "the musical palette before me was larger than had I first discovered the guitar and started listening to just guitarists. I knew there was a bigger picture."

From age 12, Fred played clarinet and was in various junior high school bands and orchestras. As a teenager Fred attended New York's High School of Performing Arts as a drama major. But he remembers many times listening to the school's orchestra and being amazed at the high level of proficiency exhibited by his classmates in the music department.

He didn't start the guitar until college, where he was an English major at Boston University, originally planning on becoming a writer. Learning chords from friends who were heavily into blues and folk guitar, he soon became obsessed with the instrument.

" When I became serious about the guitar," Fred remembers, "which was almost immediately after I picked one up at college, I thought back to my high school musician friends and realized I had a lot of work ahead of me. For a long time I imagined most guitar players were ahead of me and that I was playing catch up. It made me work all the harder."

His introduction to jazz guitar came when he bought Kenny Burrell and Wes Montgomery albums. After hearing Wes, he knew what he wanted to do. But he cites many musicians as influences. Among guitarists he mentions Wes, Johnny Smith, Jim Hall, Pat Martino, George Benson, Kenny Burrell, Lenny Breau, Ted Greene and of course, George Van Eps.

Yet the more Fred delved into the pianistic style of guitar, the more he listened to pianists. His major influence was Bill Evans but he listened and continues to listen to such great pianists as Herbie Hancock, Ahmad Jamal, Chick Corea , Mark Copland, Brad Mehldau and many others. "No matter what the instrument," says Fred, " there is always something to be learned from great musicians."

The first jazz guitarists Fred heard live were at Boston's Jazz Workshop where he caught Kenny Burrell and then George Benson. "They amazed me," he recalls, " after hearing those guys I just practiced harder."

After college, Fred Fried spent five years in Los Angeles where he was fortunate to study for six months with the great George Van Eps, the father of the 7-string guitar. The hallmarks of Van Eps' influential style were the depth, richness and complexity of his playing.

"George," Fred explains, "got me thinking about the guitar in more pianistic terms and helped me greatly in acquiring the technique I would need to play music the way I heard it."

Recently, guitarist/writer Robert Yelin in Just Jazz Guitar magazine wrote that "Fred Fried has answered the fifty year old question: What direction will the art of 7-string playing go after George Van Eps? He (Fried) is a master improviser, weaving single lines with chords or playing two lines together. His pianistic approach to playing and composing make him unique as a jazz guitarist as well as a jazz composer. His music is 'ear opening,' sophisticated, beautiful and swinging. Once you hear Fred play just a few notes you will always recognize him."

When asked why he started playing the 7-string guitar and why he stuck with it. Fred reveals that "when George Van Eps explained the expanded range of his instrument it just made perfect sense. The seventh string is simply an "A" under the guitarist's usual low "E," considerably expanding the instrument's range into the bass register. He humorously warned me that once I started on 7-string I'd never go back to six. He was right. On the 7-string I was able to hit bass notes an octave under where they would normally be on the guitar's fifth string. Walking bass lines also became more effective. But these were just the obvious advantages. Less obvious were the new chord voicings I discovered and still discover since the 6th and 5th strings are free to sound notes other than roots. However, as I played more and more pianistically I realized that it wasn't always necessary to play roots all the time. This gives my playing a more modern, open, impressionistic feel."

Returning to New York, Fred had a four year engagement at the renowned Windows on the World atop the World Trade Center with the Judd Woldin Trio. Later, he was featured at Rockefeller Center's Rainbow Room, both as a solo guitarist and with a quintet. His return to New York also found him leading groups in and around the metropolitan area at such influential Jazz rooms as Gregory's and Birdland.

A sample of the musicians and singers Fred Fried has appeared with in both New York and Los Angeles include Art Pepper, Derek Smith, Marty Napoleon, Jay Leonhart, Mike Formanek, Perry Como, Barbara Cook, Helen O'Connell. In L.A., he was a featured soloist with the Alf Clausen Big Band.

In New York, he was one third of an unusual trio, Threeba, which included the tubist of the Empire Brass Quintet, Sam Pilafian. Fred also played a number of solo concerts, one as part of the Greenwich Village Jazz Festival and another at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, which was produced by the American Institute of Guitar. In yet another concert sponsored by the Institute, Fred performed with celebrated guitarist Gene Bertoncini.

Fred currently resides in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where he finds the atmosphere particularly conducive for playing and composing. Since relocating to the Cape, Fred has played with some of New England's finest jazz musicians including Dick Johnson, Gary Johnson, Lou Colombo, Bruce Abbott, Greg Abate, Billy Marcus, Bob Nieske, Matt Gordy, Kenny Wenzel and singer Shawnn Monteirro.

In the summer of 2000, Fred's solo guitar was the opening act for Diana Krall at the Cape Cod Melody Tent. He currently divides his time between gigging and teaching privately. His busy gig schedule, mostly on Cape Cod, includes everything from solo gigs (Friday nights at Sparkfish Restaurant in Brewster, MA) to a duo with saxophonist Bruce Abbott (Thursday nights at the Black Cat in Hyannis, MA). This summer on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, Fred has a quartet at Bubala's in Provincetown featuring Michael Lavoie on bass and Ron Lundberg on drums. The saxophone chair rotates between Bruce Abbott and Dennis Cook. And Sundays, Fred will be featured at Wellfleet's Inn at Duck Creek, a duo with either sax or bass.

Thankfully, Fred is well recorded, with six CDs as a leader. His seventh, *When Winter Comes*, has just been released. "Though people often remark about my unusual approach to the guitar," he explains, "I have never been interested in technique for its own sake. It must be in the service of a musical vision. The guitar is a polyphonic instrument and to me that is where my true feeling and passion for music lies- when voices move together, with each other or against each other, as in a dance. I have tried to be faithful to this vision both in my solo and trio recordings."

About *When Winter Comes*, Fred reveals that it "includes nine original compositions and features a string orchestra arranged and conducted by the very gifted Richard DeRosa. On bass and drums we have, as in my previous CD, *Infantry of Leaves*, Steve LaSpina and Billy Drummond, two supremely talented musicians. This new recording is, to me, not simply a guitar album. It is most certainly a jazz recording but I think it almost defies categorization. I think the compositions, the playing and the arranging make this quite a unique offering and I hope it reaches the hearts of many people."

Amidst a sea of talented guitarists playing today, Fred believes that what sets him apart, especially from other 7-string guitarists, is that "although there are players who work out arrangements that have a pianistic aspect, I have trained myself to actually improvise in this manner. That is, I can sit down and improvise inner lines or bass lines or comp under a melody or improvised line. I have developed the ability to harmonize a melody any number of ways. This doesn't mean that I won't just let fly on a single line solo. I certainly enjoy that, but I think the harmonic and pianistic aspects of my playing give the guitar greater dimension. I don't, however, consider this a tremendous feat in any way. It's just the way I have trained myself to play and I consider myself very fortunate in that over time a very distinctive sound and style has evolved."

"The guitar for me has always been a means toward creating the music the way I would want to hear it. And at the heart of it all music is a spiritual endeavor. It's the wordless expression of the human spirit."

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