



A CO U S T I C G U I T A R I S T

PETER FINGER

Peter Finger

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# Peter Finger

# Peter Finger – ACOUSTIC GUITARIST

As someone who is involved in the music business as a guitarist, record label owner, magazine publisher, and festival organizer, it can sometimes be a challenge to determine Peter Finger's primary activity. However, while all of his ventures have been blessed with success, it only takes a short listen to realize that Finger has a secure place among the world's finest acoustic guitarists.

Although there is no shortage of virtuosos in the world of guitar, Finger stands out as a unique talent. Playing an open-tuned steel-string guitar with a set of metal fingerpicks, he presents a musical depth, dynamic range, and rhythmic energy that few other solo instrumentalists can match. Praised for his original compositions (which make up the majority of his repertoire), Finger plays music that would stand on its own without requiring flashy playing techniques, yet it is impossible to not be impressed with his seemingly effortless abilities on the fingerboard. Impossible to categorize, the results fall under the general umbrella of "contemporary fingerstyle guitar", but Finger's ability to magically fuse wide-ranging influences into a cohesive whole sets him apart and transports him into the pantheon of acoustic players. Originally influenced by folk, blues, and ragtime styles, Finger's soundscape is just as likely to be informed by Bartok or Debussy as it is by

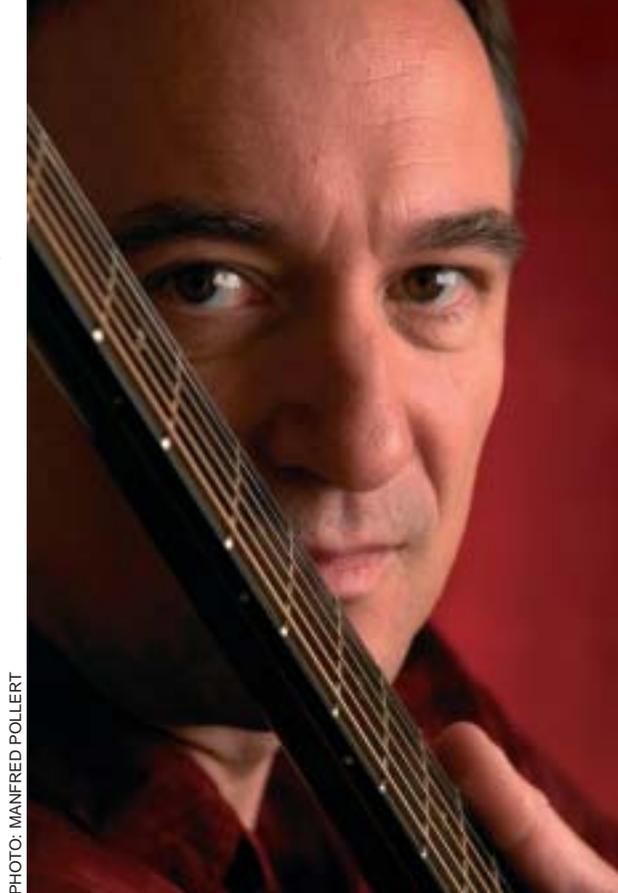


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B.B. King or Jimi Hendrix, and he also uses elements of world music or the improvisational elements of jazz in his playing. Perhaps guitarist Tim Sparks has found a proper way in which to describe Finger's accomplishments: "He has great passion and incredible chops, and he's always pushing the envelope of his playing. But more than that, Peter has found a singularity with the sound that comes from his special tuning and all the musical streams of experience which he pours into his guitar. His music pulls the listener into a unique, haunting, and exhilarating universe."





# Peter Finger – Interview

by Teja Gerken

## How did your career as a guitarist get started?

When I was about 13 years old, an uncle of mine gave me an old guitar. I was

and fun, but the experience was mostly frustrating, and eventually the band broke up. During this time, my hometown had an annual folk festival, which I started to check out. For the first time I saw fingerpicking guitarists, who played bass, rhythm, and melody simultaneously. I was so impressed that I wanted to learn playing in this style right away.

## Did you mostly learn by watching these players?

Yes, I would watch until I figured out what they were doing, and then I would practice at home until I could play it myself. It was a very intense period, and I quickly got to know people who were established in the scene. One guy had a huge collection of records by folk, blues, and ragtime guitarists, and he introduced me to seminal players like Robert Johnson, Mississippi John Hurt, Reverend Gary Davis, and also younger guitarists such as Stefan Grossman, David Laibman, and John Renbourn. After a while, I was playing a lot of the country-blues and ragtime repertoire, which I really enjoyed. I also played guitar in a folk group, which allowed me to fine tune my technique as a backup player. However, a year later I participated in the new-talent competition at the folk festival playing solo, and I ended up receiving the first prize. This was the real start of my career, because the prize included a recording session, which resulted in my first EP. I sent this recording to Stefan Grossman, who had just started his Kicking Mule label.

“Peter Finger is one of my all time favorite guitarists! His music is highly refreshing and his playing absolutely wonderful.”

*Sergio Assad*

“Peter Finger is a truly unique musician – and I love his work!”

*Tommy Emmanuel c.g.p.*

very excited about it, but I didn't really succeed in learning to play it at first. The guitar gathered dust for a few months, until I joined a youth group—something similar to the boy scouts—that needed someone who could accompany some songs around the campfire. The group leader showed me a few chords, and I guess I made an impression. I was familiar with music itself, as I had already had seven years of violin lessons, and I came from a musical family. After a short time, I could play as well as the group leader, and a short time later, I started a band in my school. At first I played on my little acoustic guitar, but then I got a red electric guitar with four pickups for Christmas. I loved this guitar because I was certain that only a red guitar would impress the girls. The entire band played through a converted radio as an amplifier.

## How come you ended up specializing in the steel-string acoustic guitar?

The band was so incredibly bad that we really didn't experience any kind of success. We had a lot of dreams

# INTERVIEW

### **This must have been in the early '70s...**

Exactly, it was 1973. He liked it, and said 'yes, we can do something, why don't you come by'. Grossman lived in Rome during this time, and together with my guitarist-friend Detlef Dürr, I drove there in my mother's old VW bug in February of 1974. Eventually, the solo album I had planned on turned into a duo recording with Detlef Dürr. I had played bottleneck-slide on a few tunes, and Stefan came up with the idea of having me record a bottleneck album. He said 'come back in a couple of months, and we'll cut another record.' I was 19 years old, and I would have probably done *anything* to be able to release another record in the US. I went home, quickly wrote about 20 pieces for

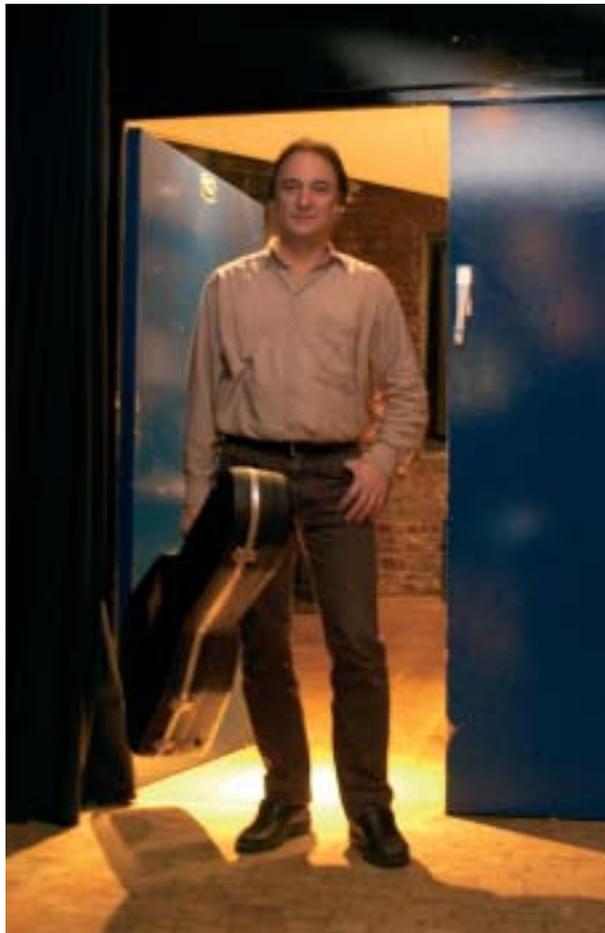


PHOTO: MANFRED POLLERT

bottleneck guitar, and two months later, I was back in Rome to record them. Musically, the album isn't all that great, but it ended up being one of the most successful recordings for Kicking Mule, probably because of the specific title, *Bottleneck Guitar Solos*. Even though there were a lot of records that featured a couple of slide guitar tunes, none were purely about bottleneck playing. It was the right concept at the right time.

### **Who was your friend with whom you made the duo record?**

Detlef Dürr just played guitar on the side while studying physics and mathematics. I think we were a pretty good duo in the context of the time, or at least our music had a certain freshness to it. We were called *Detlef and Finger*. Detlef is now a mathematics professor at the university in Munich, and only plays music at home. We had a lot of fun performing together.

### **So your early guitar influences came from the blues and folk scene?**

Right. I played a lot of Gary Davis, Mississippi John Hurt, Robert Johnson, etc.

### **The classical influence in your guitar music came later?**

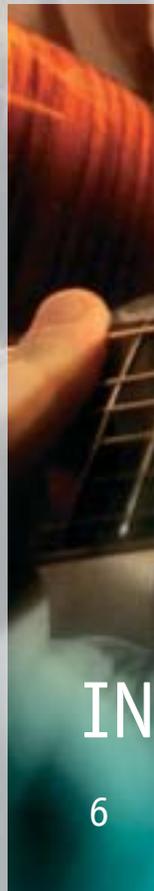
Yes, much later. During this time, I was very removed from classical music. I wanted to distance myself from the things I grew up with. Back then, classical musicians tended to be very rigid in their thinking and their behavior, and they seemed ignorant toward other styles of music, which kept me away from the general classical music scene in my early 20's. I did continue to play classical music on the violin, but at the time, this didn't influence my own compositions on the guitar. I didn't get back to my roots until I was about 23. At this time, I played a pretty varied repertoire in my

concerts, and during one particular show, I had a defining experience while playing a blues. I began singing 'I was born in Mississippi,' and while I sang, I said to myself, 'what are you talking about?' I began to think about it, and suddenly realized that the blues wasn't *my* music. After getting re-orientated a little, I tried to listen within myself and to search for my own music.

### **How did you proceed in your development?**

This particular experience was the turning point, but there were others as well, although I'd rather not remember some of them... The first step was to stop singing. The most difficult aspect was to find a way to be true to myself without alienating my audience. In the early '70's, people loved it when you played blues and ragtime, and the shows generally did really well. It was tempting to continue in this direction, but I just couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't play music that I didn't really stand behind anymore. Influences from rock music began displacing the blues and ragtime pieces, and in 1976, I recorded the album *Acoustic Rock Guitar* for Kicking Mule. I now think that I had managed to develop a pretty unique guitar style, but unfortunately it wasn't all that successful, because people wanted to hear ragtime and blues.

I kept pursuing this new direction, and eventually augmented the rock influences with jazz and modern classical music. My father, who was a conductor, played an important role in my development during this time. I had always had the impression that he wasn't taking me seriously with my music, which led me to really practice and push my abilities. I wanted to prove to my father that I could make a living as a musician, and also that the guitar is an instrument that can be used for serious music. I became more self-confident once I began making a living with music, and the sense of competition with my father began to disappear. I ended up relating to classical music again, and asked him for



“Peter just seems to go from strength to strength. Everytime I hear him he has moved on and he was pretty astounding back in the early days. ‘Blue Moon’ is simply awesome.”

*John Renbourn*

“I think that Peter adds a whole new dimension to the world of fingerstyle guitar. He’s phenomenal!”

*Buster B. Jones*

## INTERVIEW

advice. He made suggestions for what I should listen to and where I could find great instrumental music. He made me aware of Stravinsky, Bartok, Debussy, and this whole world of 20<sup>th</sup> century classical music. I listened to this music very intensively for a while, which was a great experience. I learned an entirely new musical vocabulary, which merged into my own music over the course of the next few years. I began to write orchestral music, and after I won a few competitions for orchestral composition, I almost quit playing the guitar. I also resumed playing violin in a string quartet, but eventually decided that I couldn’t do everything at once. Because I didn’t play the violin well enough, I ended up returning to the guitar. What I learned was that my compositional roots are in classical music—particularly 20<sup>th</sup> Century classical music—which is the direction that I’ll probably keep going in. However, I don’t want to write material that’s as out there as like the avant-garde composers do, because I want to stay connected with my audience.

### **Did you ever play music from the classical guitar tradition on the steel-string guitar?**

I used to play a little Bach, with steel-strings and fingerpicks, even in concerts. But as great as Bach’s music is, what I really want to play is my own music. The other thing is that there are already so many really good classical guitarists... I do want to continue getting compositional inspiration from the classical literature for piano and orchestra.

### **Looking back, what have been the highlights of your musical career to far?**

I’d say that my first recordings and concerts were definite highlights. When I recorded my first album at 18, that was a highlight. At that time, recording an album was something very special, especially for an 18-year-old German on an American label. Later, appearances

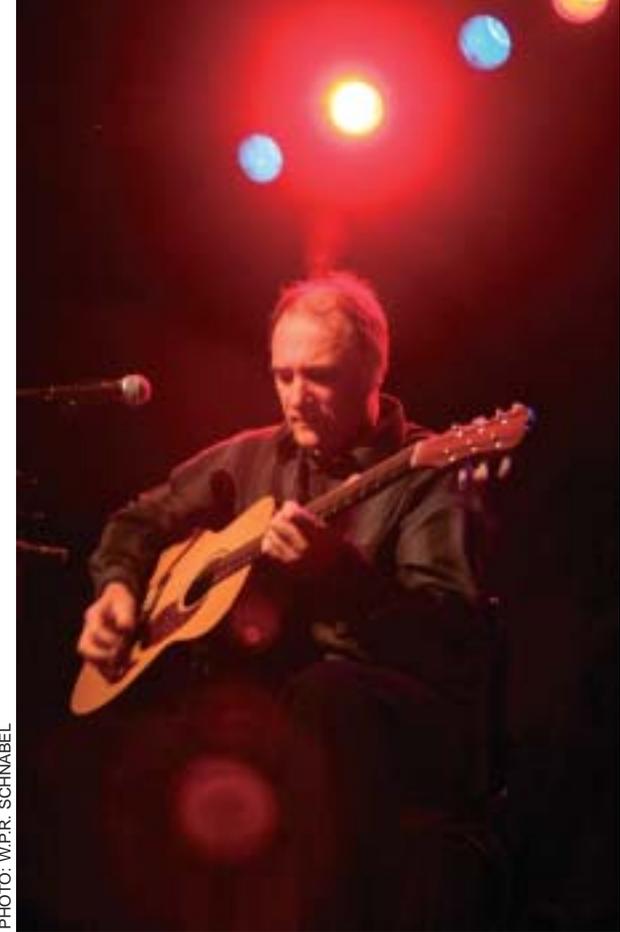


PHOTO: W.P.R. SCHNABEL

on TV became highlights, as well as festivals where you play in front of 20,000 people. The first tours in a new country are also something that I still think of as being really exciting.

### **Have you ever done anything professionally that wasn’t related to playing guitar?**

Yes, I started studying music at the university, primarily to have some security so I could have become a teacher if I needed to. I also built about 20 guitars. I wrote and moderated radio programs, and also wrote songs for children’s TV shows with my son. I guess all of this somehow does relate to the guitar though...

### **Do you see yourself more as a guitarist or as a composer?**

For a long time, I saw myself more as a composer. Ever since I was a child, I had a feeling of having a special mission in life. I always felt that this calling was about composing, or perhaps about exploring uncharted territory, whatever that means. I think it all has to do with creativity. I've had big goals in this regard, but unfortunately also the realization that one lifetime isn't enough. In terms of composing, you have to choose a niche, because there are so many great composers already. I've chosen the niche of guitar, and within that, the steel-string guitar. In this area, I try to give the entire scene a move forward in quality.

There have always been phases where I practiced a lot and I would see myself more as a performing guitarist. I have to keep practicing with my way of writing, because otherwise, I can't play the pieces the way I want to.

### **How would you describe your music?**

Ideally, I wouldn't describe it at all... However, sometimes it's necessary, and then I usually choose fairly generic terms like 'New Acoustic Guitar.' If I try to describe it a little more in depth, then I'd say that I try to take the elements I like best from different kinds of music. For example, with jazz, it's the improvisation. I was never a jazz guitarist, but I've always been interested in the style, and I've learned from it. With classical, I try to emulate counterpoint and compositional techniques. With folk music, it's the relaxed presentation, and how you make music *for* an audience.

### **What can you say about your unusual guitar tuning?**

I started focusing on one tuning in the beginning of the '80's. This tuning is EBEGAD, and I also use a variation, DAEGAD. I was using about 15 different

tunings before, but then I started to get more involved with studying harmony and improvisation. Using lots of different tunings makes it very easy to loose track, so I decided to concentrate on just one. In some ways it's easier to play in many different tunings, as each comes with its own character and expression, but you have to concentrate if you really want to understand the fingerboard.

### **How come you didn't go with standard tuning?**

Because when I used standard tuning, I found that when I composed I kept going in musical directions that already existed. I finally told myself, 'ok, this is enough. You're going to completely retune the guitar, and then you won't know anything anymore, and you'll just play and produce some new kinds of sounds.' Now everything really did sound different, and I liked what I heard.

### **Do you think that you have a special individual playing technique?**

It's possible, but I've never thought about it. I always practiced what I needed. I use metal fingerpicks, which is left over from when I played country-blues. There aren't a lot of guitarists left today who still play with metal picks, most players use artificial nails. However, I have a very strong playing style, and nails wouldn't last very long, so I'd rather trust my picks and work on my technique to eliminate most of the unwanted noise they cause. The big advantage of using fingerpicks is that they allow a powerful attack. If necessary, you can play almost as if you were using a flatpick.

### **How do you compose and practice?**

Let's start with practicing. I go through phases in which I practice a lot, sometimes four, five, or even six hours a day. Most recently, I've been carefully watching



PHOTO: MANFRED POLLERT

“Peter is a musical bomb exploding with textures, ideas and atmospheres.”

*Stefan Grossman*

“Peter Finger combines awesome chops with an advanced compositional sensibility that puts him in the highest echelon of contemporary acoustic guitarists.”

*Laurence Juber*

“Peter Finger is a true original guitarist. His music is intelligent, emotional and captivating. I believe that he’s one of the best guitarists that ever walked the planet!”

*Peppino D’Agostino*

what my weaknesses are, which I then address in specific exercises that I write for myself. Right now, these fill an entire file. I try to play an exercise without any mistakes ten times in a row. If I don’t make it, then I start from the beginning, until I succeed. Sometimes it can take two hours to play one exercise. I’ll reduce the tempo until I can do it.

I’ve been really interested in brain research, and I now try to practice in a brain-friendly way. It doesn’t do much to practice without concentration, but on the other hand, you just can’t concentrate on one thing for hours and hours. I use specific tricks to keep my concentration for long periods of time. The largest part of my practice is taken up by coordination exercises, but from time to time, I also try to practice my repertoire, or I work on my timing.

Composing is a completely different thing. Sometimes it happens really quickly. I’ll have an idea, and immediately realize it’s a good one work it out, and an hour or two later, the piece is done. This is the exception though. Sometimes it takes months, and some attempts I’ll throw out after a while because I simply can’t get to the results that I want. My own standards of the quality I expect play an important role during this process, which is why I used to compose much quicker. Sometimes I write with the guitar, sometimes without. If I write without the guitar, then I just write the notes down and hope that they sound like what I’m imagining. Unfortunately, some of these pieces can be unplayable and end up in the trash. It’s also possible to have very positive surprises though, and you might end up with a composition that you would have never written on the guitar. I usually have an idea of a structure, which I then try to fill out with different themes that I try to interweave. I also try to write as imaginatively as possible. This means to not just do whatever is convenient on the guitar, but to write

the way you would for piano or orchestra. I also listen to a lot of orchestral music when I compose, and I think that doing this can teach a lot about counterpoint or melody lines.

#### **What information do you try to pass on in your workshops?**

It varies. It always depends on the level of the students. A lot of times, you’re faced with a group of students that includes beginners as well as players who are almost professionals, and it can be difficult to find common ground. I usually teach one of my pieces. I try to give a lot of general advice about topics such as interpretation of a theme, dynamic expression, or the arc of a composition. It’s not just about technique on the guitar, but also about playing in a musical way. Creating good tone is also part of it. Sometimes it’s mostly about stimulating the student. Many times I’ve heard that participants get a lot out of just watching me interpret a piece. Workshops are mostly about inspiration and motivation. You can’t really improve your technique in just a few days, this will take years of practice, but the motivation is important.

#### **What does your ideal performance venue look like?**

I like a theater with great acoustics, where I can play without amplification. The ideal venue has a nice back-

PHOTO: W.P.R. SCHNABEL



stage room with some drinks, something light to snack on, and perhaps a couch. It's nice to have an hour before the show to relax and prepare. Of course it is ideal if the audience is ready to listen to a soloist for two hours, which I try to make as engaging and suspenseful as possible.

### **Do you think that guitarists and non-guitarists relate differently to your music?**

Yes, that's possible. A lot of people consider me a virtuoso, which I don't necessarily agree with. I just learn what I need for my own music, and I don't concern myself with being virtuosic. However, virtuosity is what other guitarists notice, they tend to analyze what they hear. This doesn't matter much to me, I just try to convey my music, and the guitar happens to be the medium I work with. The fact that sometimes I need more notes and sometimes less has to do with musical vocabulary.

### **You've played all over the world. Are there places where you particularly like to perform?**

Every country has a few great venues, it doesn't matter whether they're in America, in Asia, or in Europe. The size of the venue isn't that important either. I've played some wonderful house concerts for 50 or 60 people, and sometimes I've had great shows in theaters with 500 or 1,000 people. Each has its own appeal, and I'm glad to be able to do both. Of course the really big shows area less frequent.

### **How did Acoustic Music Records get started?**

I had been touring and giving concerts for many years, and I had one of those moments of self-doubt. I felt like I wasn't moving forward musically, and I thought to myself 'now that you've composed this much, how should things keep going without constant repetition?'

You reach your limits, facing hurdles that seem impossible to surmount. In those times, you have several options: You can practice and become technically more proficient, so that you forget your instrument while playing music by expanding your technical boundaries. Another possibility is to reduce your music to its most important elements. You can also expand your musical horizon, for example by listening to completely different music in order to get inspired. I reached such a hurdle in the 1980's, which was a time where it had also become more difficult for acoustic musicians in general. Our audience stayed home, concerts were poorly attended. Computers, synthesizers, and sequencers had become popular, and other kinds of music were in demand. Nobody knew how it was going to continue, it was very frustrating. I felt the need for a creative break, and I thought to myself 'let's do something different on the side, and try to build something up.' Of course I also wanted to have another source of income, so that I wouldn't have to depend on my concerts alone. I didn't like the pressure of having to make money. I wanted to play music for fun and because I felt that I had a calling, and I didn't want to compromise stylistically. I considered building guitars. I had already done this, and really enjoyed it. However, I really just wanted to build guitars for myself, not for other people. I finally thought that a publishing company would be a way to combine music and business. I had difficulties finding a new label myself, and having had the experience of being on labels that didn't do anything for me in the past, I thought 'now or never.' I was fascinated by the possibility of running a business parallel to playing music, and so I started Acoustic Music Records. It was very slow at first. I started with my own record, which I presented to all the radio stations, who basically



PHOTO: BRANKO KURUKIN

laughed at me. To them, I was the wacko who started a label for acoustic guitar at a time when nobody was interested in this music, but I didn't give up. It didn't take long for me to sign other musicians who were without a label. Some I just became aware of during this time, others came by recommendation. For example, Duck Baker told me about Tim Sparks, John Renbourn told me about another guitarist, and everything moved forward really quickly. Suddenly I had a nice little catalog, and the media began taking me seriously. The whole thing continued growing over the years as new projects and business ideas were added. I never really wanted to work so much, but the business just grew and grew. After a while, I had less and less time to play guitar, as the day job was always more important than practicing. After a few years, I reached a point where I couldn't do it anymore. I had to decide whether I wanted to be a musician or not. Suddenly, I became aware of the real purpose of my life again, which had been pushed to the side by the business. I had to ask myself again 'what really matters to you?' Ultimately, the decision was very clear. After producing about 360 CD's, 80 music books, publishing a magazine for ten years, and organizing a festival for seven years, everything had basically become a routine. The creative phase of starting a business was over, and I was ready to quit, but in the end, I decided to take a

“Peter Finger is much more than a great guitarist playing a very dynamic and intensive music with many orchestral qualities, he is a real artist and composer using his instrument as a vehicle, with a very distinctive sound and touch. He also has all my gratitude for his longtime support to guitar music in general. We owe him a lot. For all this, thank you Peter!”

*Pierre Bensusan*

“Peter Finger is a living legend in the world of acoustic guitar music. A virtuoso guitarist and gifted composer, he’s probably done more to promote the acoustic guitar than anyone I know.”

*Martin Taylor*

partner into the company. Now the future of the business is secure, and I can slowly pull back and play music again.

**What do you look for when you look for or find new artists for AMR?**

Today, it is difficult to sell CD’s, especially if the artists aren’t well known. Toward the end of the 1990’s, it was relatively easy, we sold pretty good numbers, but right now, it’s tougher. As a label, you have to make sure that the musicians help in making themselves known by touring. That’s the business side. With the music, I mostly look for originality and personality. It has to have something that grabs you.

**What kind of advice would you give young guitarists who want to establish themselves in the scene?**

If you think you’re on the right track, then I would recommend having a lot of patience and perseverance. It certainly doesn’t hurt to be self-critical. It’s getting more difficult all the time, but I’m convinced that those who are good can make it. I think real geniuses don’t get overlooked, that they’ll be noticed. Of course most players aren’t real geniuses, but they’re still very good. As a newcomer, I’d also think in terms of marketing and originality, to not do the same as everyone else. This is easier said than done, however...

**What is the purpose of the *International Guitar Night* that you founded and continue to organize?**

PHOTO: MANFRED POLLERT



The *International Guitar Night*, which I started in 1993, is basically an event that I created to present the artists on the label to a larger audience. Hardly anyone knew the musicians when I started out, and the guitar wasn’t very popular as a concert instrument in Germany. It goes without saying that the label has played a part in changing this perception, if only for the sheer number of guitar CD’s that have been put out, and the magazine (*‘Akustik Gitarre’*) that we publish; the annual *International Guitar Night* tour is just another step. If an unknown musician tried to play a concert by himself, he might have drawn 20 or 30 people. Working with several musicians, we could present the show as an event, and suddenly we drew 200 to 300 people. It’s a win-win situation. It really brings me full-circle to what I learned from Stefan Grossman when I was 19. Just look at the success of my bottleneck record over 30 years ago. You have to sell a concept, not an unknown name.

**Is the *Open Strings festival* you organize in Osnabrück similar to the *International Guitar Night* in its concept?**

The *Open Strings* festival is an event of several days. Besides the concerts, we have a big exhibition, workshops, and a competition for new talent. Again, most of the people come for the whole package, not just because of individual musicians.

**With all these guitar-related activities, do you have time for any other interests?**

As I said, I'm interested in brain research, and some day I want to write a book, but that will have to do with music again. The brain and practice, how to work effectively, regardless of the instrument. I'll have to get together with some specialists. I'm also going to start building some instruments again. Working with your hands is a good balance to all the work I do in my head, but again, it has to do with the guitar. I can get excited about a lot of things, but I have to divide my time, because I like to do everything I'm involved with as well as possible.

**What gives you the drive to keep going after all these years?**

I need to have stable and familiar surroundings to do my best work. In this regard, I'm very lucky to have a great

partnership with my wife, Odile. In the company, it helps a lot to have a good team, and I've been very lucky with that as well. Everything else is motivation. It's part of my restlessness and curiosity. If I wanted to, then I could pretty much retire at this point, provided that the company continues to run the way it does. However, I think that I would get terribly bored.

I would get bored with just composing, even though it's very exciting. I also wouldn't want to just play guitar, I want to do lots of different things. I love playing the guitar and composing, but I also enjoy marketing and business. It's all fun, but the main focus is always on the music. Doing all these different things on the side helps me to not get stuck in the details of my music, because I also focus my thoughts on other things in between.

**How do you think the guitar scene has changed in the last 20 or 30 years?**

The guitar scene has changed in that we were all young 30 years ago, and now we're all old. Today, there are only a few young guitarists, so the scene got older with us, along with its overall mentality. When I used to say 'hey, I have a gig for you,' then the reply would be 'great, what is it, where is it, and how many people will be there?' There was a lot of excitement, just to play the gig. When I tell someone that I have a gig for them today, they often say 'ok, how much does it pay?' The interests have shifted over the course of

the years, and I see a lack of curiosity. Of course I also see a very, very positive side. We now have an incredible network of guitarists who help each other out and who tour together. For example, I noticed that it was just about impossible for me as a German to play in Japan by myself. What I needed was a player in Japan who could help me out, and in turn, I'd help that same player in Germany. So many of our artists now tour together and invite each other for concerts. It all started with an exchange between me and Peppino D'Agostino. Now there are many other Acoustic Music Records artists, and we have an international network.

**What do you look for in a guitar that you play?**

For me, there is a difference between a working instrument and one that I play for myself at home. For composing, concerts, and practicing, an instrument simply has to function well and be dependable. Ideally, you can forget that you're even holding an instrument. If you're playing music for yourself, then obviously there are guitars with special character. These can be a lot of fun to play, but usually won't work for all of my tunes. For example, I have a few vintage Martin OM guitars from the 1920's and 1930's. They sound amazing, but I miss having a cutaway for some pieces, and I'd be more likely to use different guitars for my dynamically more extreme compositions. Still, these old guitars are incredibly transparent. It's also something really special just to hold an instrument with an 80-year old history. I do play on a lot of other instruments. Some don't have that special tone, but can be used more universally. Besides my old Martins, I have a few very good guitars by makers such as Lakewood, Kevin Ryan, Oetter, and others.

The connection with the guitar is a special topic. I feel most connected to guitars that I built myself, where I probably gave some blood in the process. The last guitar I built is my favorite, but I can hardly wait to build the next one.



PHOTO: MANFRED POLLERT

“Hector Berlioz, one of the greatest masters of orchestration, says in his method that the guitar (*and he played the guitar himself!*) sounds like a small orchestra. When I listen to Peter Finger playing his compositions on the guitar I have the feeling I’m not listening to a small but to a full symphonic orchestra!”

*Marco Pereira  
Rio de Janeiro February, 15<sup>th</sup> 2005*

## Peter Finger – BIOGRAPHY

**B**orn in Weimar, Germany in 1954, Finger was raised in a musical family (his father was a conductor), and began studying the violin and piano at age six. As a teenager, Finger’s growing talent on the classical violin earned him the first prize of the prestigious *Jugend Musiziert* (Youth Playing Music) competition twice, but it was on another instrument that he would soon get recognized as one of its most creative ambassadors. Having initially discovered the guitar as a way to rebel against his parents’ musical ideals, he had become fascinated with the fingerpicking guitar style that was prevalent during the folk music movement of the 1960’s. Within a couple of years, he had honed his skills to where they got the attention of American guitar legend Stefan Grossman, who immediately signed the 19 year old to his brand-new Kicking Mule Records label. Released in 1974, Finger’s *Bottleneck Guitar Solos* became one of the labels best



1973

selling albums, catapulting the young artist to international acclaim.

Since these early beginnings, Finger has created a musical career full of impressive highlights. Concert tours have delighted fans throughout Europe, North America, Asia and Russia, more than a dozen albums have received the approval of critics the world over, and collaborators have included heavy-hitters such as vibraphonist Florian Poser, saxophonist Charlie Mariano, and percussionist extraordinaire Trilok Gurtu. It goes without saying that among aficionados, Finger’s name is mentioned in the same breath as players such as Ralph Towner, Leo Kottke, Michael Hedges, or Baden Powell. Finger is also held in high regards among his fingerstyle guitar peers, many of whom have found a home on *Acoustic Music Records*, the specialty label he founded in 1988.



1972



1973



1980



1985

# BIOGRAPHY



Following his early prize-winning success on the violin, Finger has been recognized with awards throughout the development of his craft. In 1973, he won the new-talent category of the Interfolk Festival in his hometown of Osnabrück, in 1982 he won the prestigious Ernst-Fischer Prize for orchestral music, in 1985, his composition *Herbstwind* ("Autumn Wind") was voted to first place in the Oldenburg (Germany) State Theater competition for orchestral composition, and he received the 2003 prize for music from the German state of Lower Saxony.

No stranger to activities off-stage and out of the recording studio, Finger has extensive experience working for TV and radio, including productions for German stations such as *WDR*, *Deutschlandfunk*, and *Deutsche Welle*. Finger began publishing the print magazine *Akustik Gitarre* in 1995, and his annual *Open Strings* guitar festival (held in Osnabrück) was inaugurated in 1998.



1972



1971



1972



1986



1984

“The first time I heard Peter Finger completely transformed what I thought the guitar could do. I was no stranger to sophisticated guitar music but Peter’s music just opened a whole new world of technique and melody.”

*Kevin Ryan*

## Peter Finger – DISCOGRAPHY

**Finger Picking**, ALP 190 (1973)

**Guitar Instrumentals**, Kicking Mule SNKF 104 (1974)

**Bottleneck Guitar Solos**, Kicking Mule SNKF 105 (1974)

**Acoustic Rock Guitar**, Kicking Mule SNKF 144 (1977)

**Zwei Seiten**, Stockfisch 5019 (1979)

**Windspiele**, Stockfisch 8006 (1980)

**Im Labyrinth** (with Florian Poser), Stockfisch 5031 (1982)

**Neue Wege** (with Charlie Mariano and Trilok Gurtu), Stockfisch 8015 (1984)

**Live**, Edition Collage 418/10 (1985)

**Niemandland**, Acoustic Music Records 1001 (1989)

**Colors Of The Night**, Shanachie 97007 (1990)

**InnenLeben**, Acoustic Music Records 1019 (1992)

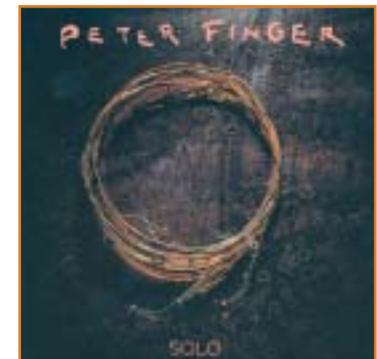
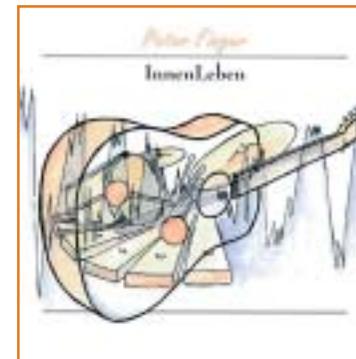
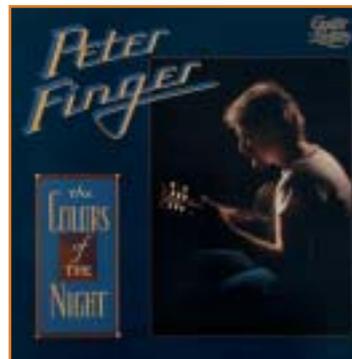
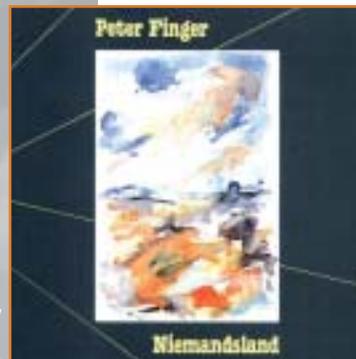
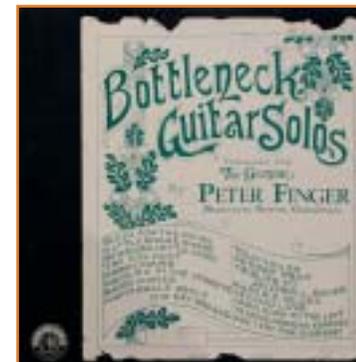
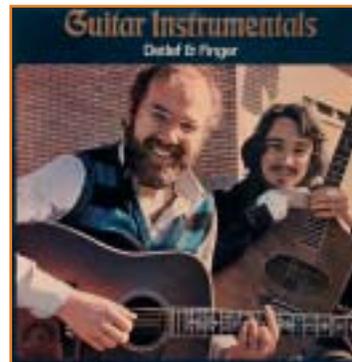
**Solo**, Acoustic Music Records 1032 (1993)

**Between the Lines**, Acoustic Music Records 1079 (1995)

**Open Strings**, Acoustic Music Records 1173 (1999)

**Blue Moon**, Acoustic Music Records 1309 (2003)

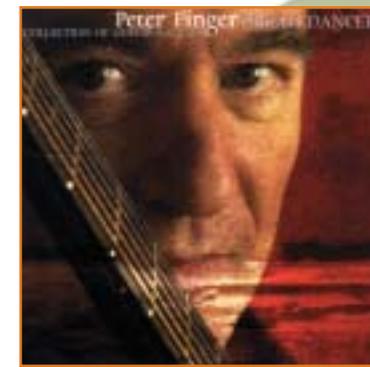
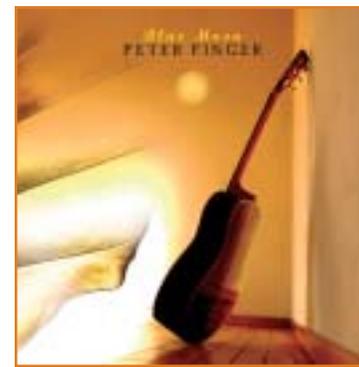
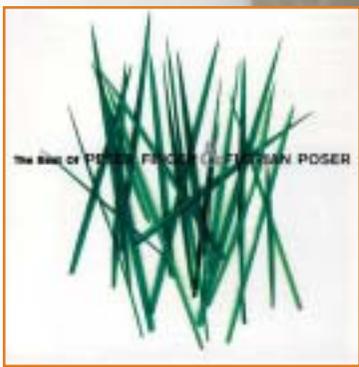
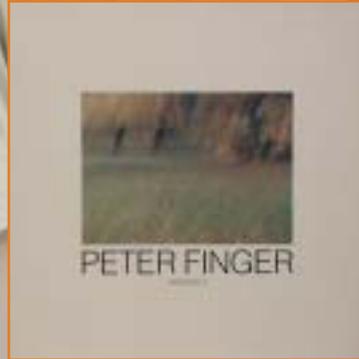
**Dream Dancer**, Acoustic Music Records 1337 (2003)



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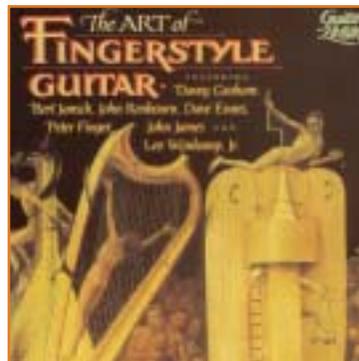


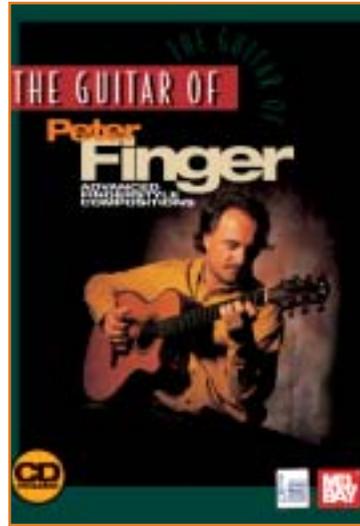
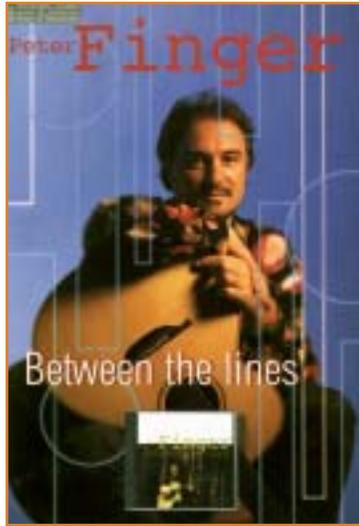
## Sampler/Compilations

“Peter Finger writes music with a harmonic palette that is broader than what usually hears in the acoustic guitar world. His music is interesting, colorful and full of life. But beyond any analysis, I just like it. I look forward to each new release, and play the cd’s repeatedly when they arrive.”

*David Tanenbaum*

- Where The Guitar Is King**, Kicking Mule SNKB 300 (1974)
- Gitarrenspiele**, Stockfisch SF 8007 (1980)
- Silently The Snow Falls**, Shanachie 95007 (1986)
- Fingerprints**, CKM 015 (1989)
- The Art Of Fingerstyle Guitar**, Shanachie 98009/10 (1991)
- The International Guitar Festival**, Acoustic Music Records 1051 (1994)
- Acoustic Guitar Highlights**, Acoustic Music Records 1005 (1995)





## Transcriptions

**Between The Lines,**  
Acoustic Music Records AMB 1079 (1995)  
**The Guitar Of Peter Finger,**  
MelBay 96993BCD (1997)



BERNARDINI

# Peter Finger – REVIEWS

“If you love guitar you must hear this compelling artist”

*Guitar Player Magazine, USA*

“Every once in a while, you come across someone who is so clearly an artist – in the most unique and profound sense of the word – that it takes you more than just a moment to get it. Peter Finger is such an artist.”

*Fingerstyle Guitar Magazine, USA*

“Finger’s solo guitar work isn’t widely known in the U.S., but those lucky enough to discover him are astounded by the power and precision of his playing and the depth of his compositions.”

*Acoustic Guitar Magazine, USA, march 2000*

Not only is Peter Finger’s technique unequalled, but also his boundless wealth of ideas. No one draws from so many different worlds of sound with such fantasy and ease, lets everything flow into a primevally powerful current that nothing can hinder on its adventurous journey.”

*Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, June 21, 2004*

“More exciting than a thriller.”

*Mindener Tageszeitung, October 22, 2002*

“One must consider him the greatest European genius of the acoustic guitar.”

*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, April 2, 2005*

“....And then the stage was prepared for the master, whose fingers were the focus of the entire

community of fans, the master who created his own particular world on the guitar, who transcended all superlatives. He followed up orgiastic musical images with gentle, almost fragiley whispered passages, worked impressions from the Caucasus into case studies in syncopation, and in every bar, he wove moments of surprise into his wildly dense carpet of sound. And all this he managed with those incredibly fast fingers.”

*Ruhr Nachrichten, May 2, 2001*

“Hearing the man play is pretty close to a guitaristic epiphany.”

*Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, December 17, 2002*

“This master guitarist has achieved something that is seldom heard on the stage these days: perfect harmony between virtuosity, musicality and composition. His musical cosmos knows no boundaries, it reveals profound knowledge of music history and of contemporary music as well.

No wonder: Finger comes from a family of musicians, and it seems to really be his lot with regards to his compositions. Peter Finger’s own works are sophisticated and so densely packed, that an orchestra could easily handle them.

Finger does it all with a single acoustic guitar, which he commands as no other. What’s impressive is how his fingers race across the fret board; his technique, which he applies very purposefully and above all with many facets, is remarkable. His vibratos in particular stand out; they are produced in various ways and he uses them to give shape to musical hues and sculpt the individual notes.”

*Bonner Rundschau, October 28, 2002*

“...Peter has crafted a playing style all his own. His compositions represent some of the most creative, original and exciting music on the guitar scene today...”

*Woody Mann*

## REVIEWS

A C O U S T I C   G U I T A R I S T



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