



Creating a
'public affair'

A lone traveler dressed in an overcoat and a tipped hat carries a guitar case into a dark and almost-vacant Oregon Electric Station. He's barely noticed as he sets his case down and settles onto a bar stool. A train is heard roaring outside in the distance. The bartender, who finishes mixing a drink for a young woman sitting at the bar's end, approaches the newcomer.

"What'll it be?" he asks.

"You got any music?" the stranger replies in monotone.

"On Saturday nights," the woman interjects.

The stranger, undaunted and relaxed, looks pensively away as visions of a slow-moving train carrying his lover emerge. And amidst railroad-station steam, jazz guitarist Don Latarski strikes the beginning chords to his new locally-produced music video "Private Affair," now being aired on cable stations nationwide.

The video focuses on Latarski as a traveling jazz musician, stranded overnight and looking for a place to musically demonstrate the emotion he's feeling for his absent girlfriend. Interspersed in this sort of musical reverie are images of a crowded barroom, where Latarski and fellow musicians are set playing in the company of Latarski's lover, who's perched at a front table, holding a yellow rose.

The video closes much the way it begins. Song completed, Latarski gathers his belongings and, before parting, moves to pick up the yellow rose lying on the table once occupied by his girlfriend.

Latarski says his new venture, which took about six months to complete, marks a new direction for him as a recording artist. He says the video was produced in Eugene last spring because it was "less expensive to pull people and machinery together for a video here," and is played on about 12 different cable stations across the country.

"We're trying to get the attention of major recording companies through a grassroots movement because I'm not as well known in other places in the country as I'd like to be," Latarski says.

The music that accompanies the video can be found on a 12-inch single, also called "Private Affair." Latarski says the music itself gives rise to new horizons because he's incorporating vocals with it for the first time. "Private Affair," a high-energy jazz piece, runs about three minutes and includes backup vocals from the Portland-based Linn Sisters. The flip side features the lead singing of Calvin Walker on a song called, "Poor Man."

Like many Eugene jazz musicians striving to gain greater recognition, Latarski keeps busy looking for ways to expose his talent on a national scale. He says the song "Poor Man" was largely the result of his playing and mixing all the instruments and rhythms in a friend's garage in Eugene.

"It was cheap because of that," he says, "and also because I got to do all the engineering, putting things together, building. And I like to do that. I like to be in charge of turning all the knobs. I can just remember that as a kid I always liked to build things. Now I like to put things together musically."

Because there are no major recording companies in Eugene, Latarski says he'll continue to diversify what he knows and can do with music until "something turns out to be very worth while."

"I've got lots of fishing lines out in the water," he says. "If something really bites, I'll have to seriously cut back on all the other things I'm doing."

From the looks of what the 32-year-old guitarist has going now, that could mean a lot. He's currently an adjunct faculty member at the University's School of Music, a member of the Performing Arts faculty at Lane Community College, and a private instructor to

about 30 students. Latarski says he's also often sponsored by the Oregon Arts Commission to tour outside the state.

The National Young Audiences program schedules him at elementary-school assemblies in Portland once a week. For example, Latarski might take a song like "Old McDonald" and demonstrate to the children how it can be rewritten to include jazz rhythms. Then he invites them up on stage to scatting to the improvised sounds.

"You get these little kids up there, and they're not afraid to try anything," he says. "It's really a gas."



Long hours in the recording studio paid off for Eugene jazz guitarist Don Latarski in the form of a high-energy 12-inch single, "Private Affair."

Latarski says he's also getting a fair amount of work writing music for commercial videos. And recently, he's been hired to compose a 30-minute song for an aerobics video by the American Gymnastics training center in Eugene.

Which brings us to the question of how all this got started.

Latarski first picked up the guitar at age 10 when he was living on a small farm 40 miles outside of Detroit. He says he took many lessons so that "I could read music pretty well by the time I was 12. Since then I haven't stopped playing the guitar for more than three days in my life."

In 1973, he decided to study in Eugene on a "whim." He says he'd never been away from home for more than two weeks at a time before then but he "just decided, though, that it was time to go."

Latarski was most influenced by early Eric Clapton and George Benson music, and now by some of Pat Metheny's lyrics. He says he was able to combine those influences into a style unique to the way he now plays.

"I like George Benson because he's got such an incredible rhythmic intensity, especially his earlier stuff," he says. "And Pat Metheny I like because of his lyrics and his sense of melody. When I'm playing I really try to play with rhythmic intensity and sort of a funky edge. Metheny doesn't have that, but I like his lyricism. So I try to combine funky lines and yet have good lyrical ideas. That's essentially what I'm trying

to do when I'm soloing and when I'm writing tunes." Latarski admits he can play any style of guitar music, but says he's found a niche in this funkish jazz style he picked up over the years. An example of his style can be found on his "Haven" or "Lifeline" albums, which he says didn't "bust any charts" but remain important to him.

Latarski has published several books on chord structuring and scale patterns for guitar as well. On the wall of his small home-recording studio hangs a framed letter from a guitar player in Poland who had requested a copy of Latarski's "Moveable Guitar Chords."

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