

More than chords

Not only does the adjunct guitar instructor write books and own his own record label, Don Latarski releases his newest CD 'Natural Instincts'



Music

By Yael Menahem
Oregon Daily Emerald

Don Latarski's day job finds him sitting in front of University students eager to learn how to play the guitar. On his own time, he records original music at his studio on his independent record label. Somehow, Latarski also finds time to write books and perform locally on a regular basis.

Most weekends you can catch him at the Oregon Electric Station in downtown Eugene. Since 1982, Latarski has led his own jazz group, The Don Latarski Group, featuring Marilyn Keller. For the last seven years he has regularly appeared at the upscale restaurant.

To celebrate his newest CD "Natural Instincts," Latarski will perform Dec. 18 at 8 p.m. at Borders Books and Music in Oakway Center on Coburg Road.

The CD is Latarski's seventh recording and his second acoustic release. "Natural Instincts" reflects his childhood experiences growing up on a farm and exploring nature.

As a nationally-known guitarist and a Northwest favorite, Latarski heads the guitar studies at the university's School of Music. He has authored numerous books, including "Scale Patterns for Guitar," "Chord Orbits" and "Practical Theory for Guitar," which was recently voted in the top 100 books written on guitar by Finger Style Guitar magazine.

A four-book series called "The Ultimate Chord Book," which took Latarski more than four years to write, will be released soon.

"[The books] are directed toward beginning players in a variety of styles," Latarski said.

Inside the books, guitarists can find postcards that allow them to send out for CDs, which accompany the chords. This allows aspiring musicians to play along with the chords.

"People can use it to improvise along with it, if they wanted to," Latarski said. "Most people can't figure out the notation without the CD."

He feels that the series of books have "a rhyme and reason [and] they're done in a musical context."

Latarski used to teach guitar lessons individually, but for the last six years he has taught guitar to large groups of students at the University. He has enjoyed the

experience, compared to his days of teaching guitar one-on-one, because he feels private lessons "are much more sedentary."

"I feel that being in the classroom is more of a performance, and I like performing and I can be animated," Latarski said.

A typical class of Latarski's begins with students listening to a famous guitar player or maybe one Latarski's favorites, like Eric Clapton or B.B. King. The instructor said he likes to introduce his students to lesser-known guitarists that he enjoys. Latarski sometimes forgets that his students belong to a new generation who is not familiar with the older greats.

This term he is teaching a class called "Funk Guitar," which is based on the music of James Brown. Latarski said he plans to write a book about the experience.

Even though Latarski is highly-acclaimed, he isn't sure that students are even aware of his success.

"I don't brag about it," Latarski said. "I'll mention it in case they want to purchase [the CDs] as gifts for a lower price."

Latarski defines his newest CD as "music that makes you feel good." He was aiming for the kind of feelings that he had as a young boy growing up on a farm, one who enjoyed climbing trees and having "the sense of freedom and a sense of place."

"Natural Instincts" is "less a 'new age' recording than an exploration of accessible harmony and memorable melody. This is folk music in the best sense: simple, rich and timeless," according to a press release.

Although Latarski will not tour extensively to promote this CD, he has performed at The Mt. Hood Jazz Festival, Eugene Celebration and Salem's da Vinci Days, among others in the past.

On Dec. 10, Latarski will share his playing skills with composer and fellow guitarist, Mason Williams, who will join the Eugene Symphony at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts for a holiday season concert entitled, "Mason Williams, Don Latarski & Marilyn Keller Jazz Up Holiday Pops."

The concert begins at 8 p.m. and will feature Old English carols, original tunes and it promises "plenty of humor and good cheer." Latarski has two feature spots in the performance. Tickets are \$28, \$22, \$12, and \$10 for youth.

The Dec. 18 performance at Borders is free.

All Don Latarski photos by Jeffrey Stockton Emerald

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