

THE MUSICAL BOX

MUSINGS ON MUSIC FROM CENTRAL KENTUCKY AND BEYOND

in performance: california guitar trio

{ April 7, 2017 @ 12:00am } ·



“You are about to witness a very strange thing,” remarked Paul Richards as he, Bert Lams and Hideyo Moriya – collectively known as the California Guitar Trio – were about to embark on a journey down what was being promised as an unexpected musical offramp.

But little about the CGT could be considered an expectation – not the unassuming stage demeanor that offset a wildly versed and versatile technical command and certainly not the instrumental makeup of three acoustic guitars that last night at a packed but still intimate performance at the Kentucky Coffeetree Café in Frankfort mixed slyly subtle original works with tunes popularized by The Beatles, The Ventures, Ennio Morricone, The Shadows, J. S. Bach, Dave Brubeck and more. Not even the trio’s seemingly non-descript moniker revealed much. Though the CGT formed in California in 1991, its members hail from Utah, Belgium and Japan.

So what constituted “strange” in Richards’ estimation? Try the realization of the CGT taking on country music. But what unfolded wasn’t country by any contemporary definition. Instead, the resulting “Buckaroo” – the Bob Morris instrumental that became a huge 1965 hit for Buck Owens – stretched its vintage Bakersfield feel to approach jazz and swing. As with everything the CGT served up during its 90 minute program, the rendition was harmonically and compositionally complete without any semblance of a traditional rhythm section present as aid.

The stylistic moods would shift regularly, from Moriya’s spacious and gorgeously contemplative title tune off the trio’s new “Komorebi” album to a take on the 1962 Shadows’ surf hit “Wonderful Land” (complete with the choreographed “Shadow walk” that took the three even further away from their often stoic stage stance). But the CGT’s internal chemistry revealed itself time and time again, whether it was in the way Richards, Lams and Moriya effortlessly juggled lead melodies during original compositions like “The Marsh” and “Cherry Trees,” the manner in which the Bach “Prelude Circulation” was passed from one player to another a single note at a time or the blending of Astor Piazzolla tango inspirations with the modern minimalism of Philip Glass on the ultra clever mash-up “Glass Tango.”

But there were also remarkable dynamics at work. The evening’s most moving moment was also one of its quietest – a pastoral delivery of “Spiritual,” a Josh Haden work recorded by his late father, the great jazz bassist Charlie Haden. Working off a Lams solo that bowed briefly to the blues, the song moved with a slow, cyclical feel peppered by melodic phrases that sounded like chimes and/or chants. What emerged was a piece of subtle, sonic beauty that completely hushed the audience, especially as the tune concluded with an eerily natural sounding fadeout. It was a blissful gem of a moment slipped within a performance full of reserved and, yes, “strange” brilliance.

meet walter tunis



I am a native Kentuckian and freelance journalist who has been writing about contemporary music for the Lexington Herald-Leader since 1980. I have not a lick of honest musical talent myself, just a pair of appreciative ears for jazz, folk, blues, bluegrass, Americana, soul, Celtic, Cajun, chamber, worldbeat, nearly every form of rock 'n' roll imaginable and, when pressed, the occasional tango and polka.

<http://musicalbox.bloginky.com/2017/04/07/in-performance-california-guitar-trio-7/>



Track Listing: Komorebi; Cherry Trees; Buckaroo; Good Vibrations; Blue Rondo à la Turk; Wonderful Land; Claymont Waltz; Glass Tango; Dig a Pony; Euphoria; Spiritual.

Personnel: Paul Richards: guitar; Bert Lams: guitar; Hideyo Moriya: guitar; Tony Levin: NS upright bass, Chapman Stick (2, 10, 11); Davide Rossi: violin (7); Petra Haden: vocals (10, 11); Nora Germain: violin (10); Tom Griesgraber: theremin (4).

Year Released: 2016 | Record Label: Self Produced |
Style: Fringes of Jazz



Komorebi

California Guitar Trio

★ ★ ★ ★

By GENO THACKARA | October 17, 2016

Things come somewhat full circle for the California Guitar Trio on their fifteenth album *Komorebi*. Having often experimented with all manner of electronics and effects to weave sound textures, here they drift back towards compositions that use their acoustic guitars pure and unadorned. It was made live in a room with a minimal rig, much the same way their earliest recordings were when starting out in 1991 (and the crystal quality on this one is sharp enough to let you feel picks hitting strings). The signature mix of eclectic covers and evocative originals remains cozy as a favorite T-shirt, familiar and accessible to listeners old or new. With this release coincidentally marking their 25th anniversary as a group, the three show that they've only gotten richer with age.

'Komorebi' is a Japanese term for the image of sunlight filtering through trees. The meditative title piece from Hideyo Moriya certainly evokes the feeling with an Eastern song structure that shifts and flows like honey. As usual, each member's writing voice is represented at least once as we go along. Bert Lams' "Claymont Waltz" is a classy nocturne that eloquently portrays the nervous excitement of approaching a step into the unknown. Paul Richards' "Euphoria" lives up to its title in an impressively tasteful way: it smolders subtly rather than blazing with energy, greatly benefiting from the lush shadings of Tony Levin's smooth bass and Petra Haden's melodious vocalese amid some extra strings.

The band's own pieces are disappointingly outnumbered by covers this time around (albeit barely), though they remain open-eared as ever in choosing material regardless of genre. The trio's trademark interplay and note-perfect intricacy make the fluid unison turns of Dave Brubeck's "Blue Rondo à la Turk" seem effortless. It's practically a cliché to tackle any Beatles song by now, though they refreshingly choose one that hasn't been played to death a million times already; meanwhile their fun take on the Beach Boys with "Good Vibrations" also deserves bonus points for including an actual theremin.

While some of the cover songs are straightforward treatments, the most successful comes with the looser arrangement that winds things up. Haden plays the siren again for a gorgeous stirring treatment of her brother Josh's classic "Spiritual," the guitars and Levin's quiet bass creating a heartwarming prairie air to bring things to a peaceful close. While it fades into the sunset, the CGT leave us in no doubt their first 25 years have left them well-seasoned in the best ways. With their insatiable restlessness, no doubt there's only better still to come.

You get two chances to catch California Guitar Trio

HIGHLIGHTS

Musicians have performed together for 25 years

Frankfort stop is one of the most intimate venues on tour

Joined on 'WoodSongs' by harmonica player Sugar Blue

BY WALTER TUNIS

Contributing Music Critic



To anyone familiar with the distinctive music of the California Guitar Trio, please bear with me a moment. You have heard this appeal before. But if you have yet to indulge in the wonderfully unclassifiable sounds of three acoustic guitarists, all with astounding technique, as they navigate through everything from folk to classical to jazz to prog to movie/TV themes and more, all with a bounty of engaging, original material leading the charge and served with unassuming humility, ... well, please forgive what might seem like a redundant appeal.

Simply put, this trio is one of those rare musical experiences that can be heartily recommended to anyone. Their music is that original, that entertaining and that appealing in its stylistic scope.

The trio — Utah native Paul Richards, Belgian-born Bert Lams and Japanese native Hideyo Moriya — has visited Lexington and Central Kentucky venues on a near-annual basis for more than a decade. But sometimes it takes a little discussion to fully outline what unsuspecting patrons will be in for at a CGT show.

In terms of musicianship, the three continually dazzle. But their demeanor is deceptively casual. There is no undue drama in the presentation of their music. They have worked together as a group for 25 years, and their technique is matched splendidly by their sense of intuition. Much of that comes from initial studies with veteran British guitarist Robert Fripp. Watching Richards, Lams and Moriya engage in a *Bach's Prelude Circulation* is very much akin to eavesdropping on a conversation. The give-and-take among the three in such a setting is astounding.

Then there is the repertoire. That has long been the most accessible selling point of a CGT

performance and perhaps a key to its broad audience appeal. On any given night, the trio might offer an Argentine folk tune (*Chacarera*), a cherished movie theme (Ennio Morricone's *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*), an extended slice of vintage prog (Pink Floyd's *Echoes*), a serving of time-crunched jazz (Dave Brubeck's *Blue Rondo a la Turk*), established rock 'n' roll (Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*, usually with encouraged audience participation) and a mash-up of the cowboy classic *Ghost Riders in the Sky* and The Doors' *Riders on the Storm* (which the CGT dubs *Ghost Riders in the Storm*).

But the CGT is far from a jukebox. Original works have long fortified their catalogue, including *Train to Lamy*, a staple suite of the trio's live shows that shifts from slide-enhanced drama to animated hoedown to border-town reflection, and the lovely requiem/reflection *Eve*.

Richards, Lams and Moriya return to the region for two performances beginning this weekend.

On Sunday, the three play perhaps the most modest room on their touring schedule: the Kentucky Coffeetree Café in Frankfort. The trio has long favored the venue's unavoidable intimacy over the years. Lams, in fact, performed there with Italian guitarist Fabio Mittino as recently as January. Given the limited seating capacity for the performance, a visit to the Café's website for ticket availability is highly encouraged.

Monday brings a return visit to *WoodSongs Old-Time Radio Hour* at the Lyric Theatre with blues harmonica ace Sugar Blue. A word on the latter: Blue is an artist with an astounding dossier that includes credits on three Rolling Stones albums and numerous associations with jazz and blues greats Art Blakey, Willie Dixon, Lionel Hampton and B.B. King. In addition to being featured in the new blues documentary *Sideman: A Long Road to Glory*, Blue will issue his first new recording in five years, *Voyage*, in late April.

California Guitar Trio

7 p.m. March 20 at the Kentucky Coffeetree Café, 235 W. Broadway. \$25. 502-875-009. Kentuckycoffeetree.com.

6:45 p.m. March 21 with Sugar Blue for the *WoodSongs Old-Time Radio* at the Lyric Theatre, 300 East Third. \$10. 859-252-8888. Woodsongs.com.



THE MUSICAL BOX

MUSINGS ON MUSIC FROM CENTRAL KENTUCKY AND
BEYOND

in performance: california guitar trio with tony levin

{ February 1, 2015 @ 11:25 am } ·



At the very heart of the California Guitar Trio's music sits a happily unbreakable bond with prog rock mainstay King Crimson. Group members Paul Richards, Bert Lams and Hideyo Moriya met over 25 years ago while studying with Crimson chieftain Robert Fripp, were introduced to mass audiences as an opening act on Crimson's storied 1995 comeback tour and have long maintained the exact and often cyclical nature of Fripp's guitar work in their own playing.

While Fripp may have formulated the alliance, longstanding Crimson bassist Tony Levin continues to uphold it. He has produced and performed on several of the CGT's recordings and, when time permits (Levin has also served as Peter Gabriel's bassist since the late '70s and co-leads his own band, Stick Men), tours as an auxiliary member of the trio. Last night's sold out performance at the St. Xavier Performance Center in Cincinnati was one of the increasingly few dates to feature all four players and, my, what a delight it was.

The CGT's usual stylistic dexterity was again on full display, both in terms of repertoire (original works, classical pieces, rock covers, surf tunes and an especially captivating jazz surprise) and instrumentation (three acoustic guitars capably augmented by pedal effects that mimic electric string instruments). As usual, technique was executed in a manner that was completely unassuming, from the dizzying completeness of Bach's familiar Toccata and Fugue in D Minor (the only piece of the evening performed without Levin) to the loosely animated surf favorite Walk Don't Run to the very Fripp-eresque original Yamanashi Blues.

For all of the deep end power Levin has displayed onstage through the years with Crimson and Gabriel, he was a portrait of taste and understatement last night. On two beautiful CGT originals, Eve and the new What Spring Does With Cherry Trees, his playing on fretless upright electric bass eschewed the usual role of rhythm maker to become a fourth melodic voice for the group. Such harmony was seamlessly expressed on the gorgeously wistful Spiritual, a tune cut 15 years ago by another outstanding guitar/bass combination, jazz greats Pat Metheny and Charlie Haden.

The surf staple Misirlou brought the party to close with a cheery groove and a roomful of and syncopated handclaps. It was the sound of giants at play.

meet walter tunis



I am a native Kentuckian and freelance journalist who has been writing about contemporary music for the Lexington Herald-Leader since 1980. I have not a lick of honest musical talent myself, just a pair of appreciative ears for jazz, folk, blues, bluegrass, Americana, soul, Celtic, Cajun, chamber, worldbeat, nearly every form of rock 'n' roll imaginable and, when pressed, the occasional tango and polka.

California Guitar Trio: A trio four success

30-January-2015 | by IAN BUSSIÈRES [French to English translation by <https://translate.google.com>]

(Québec) On his return to the capital, the California Guitar Trio Thursday offered to the public of the Palais Montcalm instrumental program nearly two hours without a hitch, though somewhat static, which showed good range of talent of these acoustic guitarists , one Japanese, one American and the third Belgian.

The presence of bassist Peter Gabriel and King Crimson, Tony Levin, as the fourth musketeer was a welcome addition to the set. His presence now on his bass Chapman Stick, sometimes on a traditional electric bass, added a lot of depth to the documents submitted.

"I'm the only one here on stage having lived in California!" Paul Richards launched after the very Californian Walk Do not Run, holding more of The Ventures group version of that of his original artist Johnny Smith.

Many of the songs performed by the group, whether their compositions or covers of rock songs, jazz or classical, had also this flavor "surf rock", a musical style particularly fond Hideyo Moriya guitarist . If he is the only member of the trio not to have directly addressed the crowd, Japanese impressed by the mastery of his instrument, particularly in the fast pace and low notes required by his favorite style.

The three guys have all studied with King Crimson guitarist Robert Fripp and also offered the public an overview of the specific teaching methods of the master. On a Suite for lute of the German composer Johann Sebastian Bach, every guitarist interpreted successively a note in rapid succession rather impressive.

Québec welcomed

Friendly, musicians reiterated that Quebec was one of their favorite cities and highlighted the presence of the former program director of the Quebec City Summer Festival (FEQ), Jean Beaudesne. It was he who invited them to the FEQ after having heard the first part of King Crimson at the Grand Theatre in 1995. "We've stayed at the Festival. We started at Pub St. Alexandre, later we played D'Youville square and we ended up on the Plains of Abraham!" Recalled Richards.

In Quebec City, which has always fallen for progressive rock, not surprising that the group has received his first standing ovation after playing the part Echoes of Pink Floyd embellished with some electrical effects.

Many spectators also responded to the invitation of the Belgian Bert Lams, inviting them to sing the classic words of Queen Bohemian Rhapsody, which made getting up again all the spectators gathered in the Raoul-Jobin Hall just before recall .

Bach was still honored recall when guitarists returned to interpret without Levin, Toccata and Fugue in D minor. Bassist then went to join his cronies the first notes of Locals, a wink in Quebec, which has turned into the Greek play Misirlou, become a shining hymn "surf rock" through the fingers of Dick Dale in the 60s.

California Guitar Trio: un trio à quatre réussi

IAN BUSSIÈRES | Publié le 30 janvier 2015 à 05h00 | Mis à jour le 30 janvier 2015 à 05h00

(Québec) À son retour dans la capitale, le California Guitar Trio a offert jeudi au public du Palais Montcalm un programme instrumental de près de deux heures sans anicroche, quoique un peu statique, qui démontrait bien l'éventail de talent de ces guitaristes acoustiques, l'un japonais, l'autre américain et le troisième belge.

La présence du bassiste de Peter Gabriel et de King Crimson, Tony Levin, comme quatrième mousquetaire était un heureux ajout à l'ensemble. Sa présence tantôt sur sa basse Chapman Stick, tantôt sur une basse électrique traditionnelle, ajoutait énormément de profondeur aux pièces présentées.

«Je suis le seul ici sur scène à avoir déjà vécu en Californie!» a lancé Paul Richards au terme de la très californienne Walk Don't Run , qui tenait davantage de la version du groupe The Ventures que de celle de son interprète original Johnny Smith.

Plusieurs des titres interprétés par le groupe, qu'il s'agisse de leurs compositions ou de reprises de pièces rock, jazz ou classique, avaient d'ailleurs cette saveur «surf rock», un style musical qu'affectionne particulièrement le guitariste Hideyo Moriya. S'il est le seul membre du trio à ne pas s'être adressé directement à la foule, le Japonais impressionnait par la maîtrise de son instrument, notamment dans le rythme rapide et les notes basses que requiert son style fétiche.

Les trois gars ont tous étudié auprès du guitariste de King Crimson Robert Fripp et ont aussi offert au public un aperçu des méthodes d'enseignement particulières du maître. Sur une Suite pour luth du compositeur allemand Jean-Sébastien Bach, chaque guitariste interprétait successivement une note dans un enchaînement rapide plutôt impressionnant.

Québec saluée

Sympathiques, les musiciens ont répété que Québec était l'une de leurs villes préférées et souligné la présence de l'ex-directeur de la programmation du Festival d'été de Québec (FEQ), Jean Beauchesne. C'est lui qui les avait invités au FEQ après les avoir entendus en première partie de King Crimson au Grand Théâtre en 1995. «Nous sommes allés souvent au Festival. Nous avons commencé au Pub St. Alexandre, plus tard nous avons joué au carré D'Youville et nous avons fini sur les plaines d'Abraham!» se rappelait Richards.

Dans une ville de Québec qui a toujours craqué pour le rock progressif, pas surprenant non plus que le groupe ait obtenu sa première ovation après avoir joué la pièce Echoes de Pink Floyd agrémentée de quelques effets électriques.

De nombreux spectateurs ont également répondu à l'invitation du Belge Bert Lams, qui les invitait à entonner les paroles du classique de Queen Bohemian Rhapsody , qui a fait se lever de nouveau tous les spectateurs réunis dans la salle Raoul-Jobin juste avant le rappel.

Bach était encore à l'honneur au rappel quand les guitaristes sont revenus pour interpréter, sans Levin, Toccata et Fugue en ré mineur . Le bassiste est ensuite allé rejoindre ses comparses pour les premières notes de Gens du pays, un clin d'oeil au Québec, qui s'est transformé en la pièce grecque Misirlou, devenue un éclatant hymne «surf rock» à travers les doigts de Dick Dale dans les années 60.

California Guitar Trio's showmanship, virtuosity on display at Alys Stephens Center

By **Michael Huebner** | February 08, 2013

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- Vintage rock, tender instrumentals, a Morricone movie theme, some Dave Brubeck, even a bit of Beethoven -- all from three guitars -- played out Thursday at the Alys Stephens Center.



The California Guitar Trio, performing on the 22nd anniversary of their first gig together at the Natural Fudge Cafe in Hollywood, returned to Birmingham for the first time since 2004. The intimate space of Reynolds-Kirschbaum Recital Hall was filled to the brim, many in the audience returnees from their previous engagement.

Hailing from Utah, Belgium and Japan, the musicians noted their studies with British guitarist Robert Fripp, whose "New Standard Tuning" they have adopted. The effect was noticeable from the start, booming bass notes (the low string is tuned to C rather than E) and a wider range allowing for increased versatility in arrangements and new compositions.

Thankfully, the trio's amplification was toned down in the 175-seat auditorium -- used more for color than for volume. The Ventures' "Walk Don't Run" was the nostalgic opener, setting the stage for a host of numbers from their albums -- the barline-defying "Melrose Avenue," the free-flowing waves of sound in "The Marsh," the quiet evocation of a mountaintop in "Punta Patri."

From the trio's first all-classical album, "Masterworks," came the first movement from Beethoven's Symphony No. 5. The expanded tuning allowed the original key of C minor to remain, but the adaptation was lost in translation, the work's nuances, color and drama relegated to the imagination.

The trio's technical and expressive command was firm throughout, easily negotiating the challenging time signatures of Brubeck's "Blue Rondo à la Turk" and Penguin Cafe Orchestra's "Perpetuum Mobile," oozing atmosphere in "Eve" and "Train to Lamy," evoking a distant galaxy in "Andromeda." Together with Paul Richards' congenial manner of introducing each number, they have created a tight, easy-flowing combination of showmanship and virtuosity.



extraordinary conversations with extraordinary musicians

California Guitar Trio :: Multiverse mastery

by Anil Prasad | Copyright © 2013 Anil Prasad

The California Guitar Trio's unrelenting passion for following the muse has served it well. The acoustic group's fearless, multi-genre explorations have driven 14 albums and nearly 1,500 gigs across its 21-year career. It has also proven that a zero-compromise musical approach can yield an ever-expanding audience. Comprised of Bert Lams, Hideyo Moriya, and Paul Richards, the group crisscrosses the universes of rock, classical, jazz, and world music in its performances and recordings.

Its most recent album, *Masterworks*, focuses exclusively on the classical side of the house. It features works by composers including Bach, Beethoven, Arvo Pärt, Schubert, and Vivaldi. Accompanying the trio are Tony Levin on upright bass and cello, and Fareed Haque on classical guitar.



The trio met while participating in Robert Fripp's Guitar Craft courses in 1987. They first toured together as part of Fripp's League of Crafty Guitarists, an orchestra of acoustic players that served as exponents of the King Crimson founder's teachings, compositions, and performance approach. In 1991, they founded the California Guitar Trio, which first made a name for itself opening for the likes of King Crimson, John McLaughlin, and David Sylvian. They have fans in high places too. The crew of the Space Shuttle Endeavour used their pieces as wake-up music. Recent years have found the group working with the Montreal Guitar Trio. The acts perform independently and in a dazzling six-guitar format during gigs. They play arrangements of each other's material, as well as innovative takes on rock standards. The collaboration has also yielded the concert recording *+Live*.

In addition, Lams has been busy on the solo front with *Unnamed Lands*, a duo project with Chapman Stick player Tom Griesgraber. It's an expansive, instrumental "progressive Americana" effort that reflects the trials and tribulations of a wagon train journey circa 1840.

Describe the impetus to create an all-classical album.

Richards: We wanted to do one for a long time. We recorded a version of Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" with Fareed Haque, which inspired us to push the project into motion. The album is a collection of pieces recorded over the years that includes some long-time favorites like Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in D minor." We wanted the album to be representative of the classical repertoire we've been performing across our history. Bert is the musician with the real classical background. He graduated from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels and has received awards for solo classical guitar, so we looked to him for direction. Hideyo and I rose to the occasion to approach the complexity and technical difficulty of the pieces. The two of us bring more of a rock background and energy to things. Overall, we're playing the pieces in an untraditional way and bringing some new life to them.

What's your vision for what the trio can uniquely bring to the classical universe?

Lams: For me, it's a matter of what I feel inside and what resonates. I don't think we really fit into the classical guitar world at all. We are not classical musicians, even though one of us is classically trained. In a way, that's an advantage, because we all come from different places. Paul comes from the USA with a rock background and

<http://www.innerviews.org/inner/cgt.html>

Hideyo comes from Japan through a very different culture. Rock music was important to all of us. We approach things from different angles, including the classical pieces we work with. The classical pieces help us mix things up in our repertoire. Also, they raise our playing to a different level. I always felt if we could play this music that people would take us more seriously, and I think that's what has happened.

What made you want to tackle something as complex as “Toccata and Fugue in D minor?”

Lams: It goes back to 1994 when our friend, the composer Stan Funicelli, approached us with the idea of doing the piece. We weren't sure at first if this organ piece would work on guitar. Initially, we just learned the toccata and it sounded so different on our steel-string guitars. It almost had a flamenco sound. We performed it for some audiences and got some good feedback, so we went ahead and tackled the whole thing. It's a three-part fugue, so it was fairly straightforward to take those three lines and arrange the voicings and registers to work on guitar. The organ has a lot more range, so we had to move things into a higher range for it to work.

When we first went on tour with King Crimson as their opening act in 1995, we were really excited to play such really big, nice theaters. But their fans had been waiting a long time to see the group. So, we'd walk onstage with acoustic guitars and a lot of people were disappointed because nobody knew who we were then. I remember a guy in Buffalo yelling “Play one song and get off!” Once we got to “Toccata and Fugue in D minor,” everything changed. We received a standing ovation and knew we had made a significant impact and that everything was going to be okay. People really responded to hearing that piece played on guitar in a way they had never heard before.

Your last three studio releases, *Masterworks*, *Andromeda* and *Echoes* are wildly diverse, exploring classical, original material and rock covers. What do they collectively reveal about the group's multiverse view?

Richards: *Andromeda* was our first all-original album, and what we're going for now is a focus on certain elements of our playing. Our previous albums have been combinations of classical music, original music, and arrangements of other material. Now, we've made a decision to focus on specific areas of what we do best for projects.



So, *Andromeda* showcases what we can do with our own music, using both acoustic guitars and electronic effects. *Masterworks* focuses on using just a natural mic sound with no effects. Those are the extremes we work within. We can do everything from heavy distortion, where it sounds like we're playing electric guitar, to really light, delicate classical playing.

Lams: They are totally different albums, but they're all about the music we love to play. It's a nice challenge to see how far we can go in a certain direction, rather than taking a compilation approach. I think we went the furthest with *Andromeda*, because we included a lot of improvisation. Maybe it's something we'll explore even more on future albums. We're now talking about what we'll do next. We've already done the classical album. Will the next one be experimental? Electric music? We're figuring that out.

Contrast the trio's process of working on arrangements of other people's music to writing original music.

Lams: I could tell you a different story for every piece we've done. All three of us are very different characters. We come from three different cultures. Hideyo tends to compose more, so when he brings in a piece, he will often have all the scores written out and it's a case of “Okay, just play your part.” [laughs] That's also when the fun begins, because we do change things as we work on the pieces. So, it's more of a threading process. When I come up with something or when we initially start on something as a trio,

we tend to start with a groove. One of us will have an idea and then we embroider on top of it. Sometimes a piece can happen within a few hours and sometimes it can take months before it gets into good shape. There is always positive energy when we sit in the same room and write together, but it's not always an easy process. People often think "Oh, you get together and the music just comes along." That's not always the case. We can recognize if something is happening or if there's magic. There's no discussion, in fact not many words are spoken as we work on the music.

In my experience, it's harder to write our own original songs. But once you get started and the piece is going, great stuff always comes along. A big factor in successful writing and arrangements of original pieces is when we play them in front of an audience. Once we've finely rehearsed something and are happy with it, we play it live. Then the extra element of audience energy comes in, which informs us about the success of the arrangement or composition.

Richards: The original compositions go through more process. One of us might come up with a basic theme, melody, chords, or riff. We might start improvising on that riff together and expand on the original idea and develop it into a piece. I think the way we work goes back to our studies with Robert Fripp. One of the main things he instilled in us was finding the "rightness" of the music, whatever that might be, for both the original pieces and the arrangements. There have been a lot of arrangements we've tried that just didn't sound right. It's a really tricky thing to define "rightness." Everyone has their own opinion on what that might be. With arrangements of other people's music, it comes down to whether or not we can create something using three guitars that brings the music to life in a different way from the original, yet still has something of value to offer.

We once did a version of John Coltrane's "Giant Steps" in which Hideyo learned Coltrane's solo note for note. I remember performing it and it was cool that we pulled it off, but I never felt it reached the level of quality or enjoyment for us as a group and the audience. Nobody is going to play it better than Coltrane did. We dropped the tune afterwards. We've also taken pieces like Pink Floyd's "Echoes" and tried something totally different with it. I remember when we started performing that live, we immediately had a sense that we were onto something. The audience had a sense of that "rightness" as well when it heard it. The arrangement unfolded in front of us as we bounced ideas off one another. Our version is totally different from the original but still captures the essence of what the composition was about.

Is there any territory that doesn't work for the group?

Richards: We've never tried to do traditional Flamenco music. I think the guys who can play Flamenco well were almost born with that ability or grew up in an environment immersed in it. There have been pieces with a little bit of a Flamenco sound to them, but we've never said "This is a Flamenco-style piece." I feel a little bit intimidated by those guys. Brazilian music is another world of music in which people from that area play it so much better than anyone else.

Take me through your signal chains.

Richards: I'm using an Ervin Somogyi custom dreadnaught with a L.R. Baggs Anthem pickup. The Somogyi has a much deeper tone and smoother high end than any guitar I've played, largely due to it using the Novax fanned fretboard system, as well as having an asymmetrical body. I also use a Digitech iPB-10 programmable pedalboard and Line 6 DL4 delay modeler for effects. Hideyo uses his Breedlove signature Hideyo Moriya Custom CM guitar with an RMC pickup, and a Roland VG-99 V-Guitar system for effects.

Lams: I have a custom Jayson Bowerman guitar, which is a shallow, dreadnaught model, with 12 frets to the body, a super-deep cutaway, and added bevel. I also use a custom Huss and Dalton CM 12, which is also a shallow 12-fret-to-the-body guitar. Having 12 frets makes the instruments similar to a classical guitar in that they're very easy on the left hand, meaning you don't have to stretch too far to the next fret. Like Paul, I use L.R. Baggs Anthem pickups on both instruments. For effects, I use a Digitech iPB-10 programmable pedalboard.

What appeals to you about the L.R. Baggs Anthem pickup?

Richards: Amplifying an acoustic guitar is always complex, because you're never really going to be able to recreate what it sounds like in a room sitting in front of the instrument. So, you always have to compromise. I've given up on regular internal mics, because they don't reflect what you're supposed to hear from a guitar. You don't stick your head inside the guitar when you listen to it. The sound you're supposed to hear is what's out front. What's cool about the Anthem is that it's a two-mic system that goes directly underneath the bridge. It has the most natural sound I've ever heard with a lot of low end, and the high end isn't brittle like most other pickups.



The group has used Robert Fripp's new standard tuning (C, G, D, A, E, G) exclusively since it formed in 1991. Does it still reveal new possibilities to you?

Richards: Definitely. I was a pretty decent rock and jazz guitarist early on. I had developed a certain playing style, but I felt kind of stuck. When I first used new standard tuning, it was a way to play things in a completely new and different way. It allowed me to let go of everything I had done previously. It presents a challenge, because the lowest five strings are all in fifths, with the G on top. The main advantage of the tuning is being able to have such wide interval leaps available within a single position. I also really like that the chord voicings are spread out, which sound very different than the tighter clusters of standard tuning. After 20 years, I'm still discovering new and different things with it.

Lams: I think it has more to do with the nature of us musicians than the tuning itself. We love to explore new sounds and possibilities. The tuning is the common thing that brought the California Guitar Trio together. The sound is really different. I feel the tuning is much more orchestral and works really well for arrangements of pieces we otherwise wouldn't be able to do like Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony." We couldn't do it in standard tuning because there are so many bass parts. With new standard tuning, we can work more like an orchestra, playing pieces that might be played on piano. It's also very transparent. It might take weeks, months or years to learn one Bach piece in standard tuning. In new standard tuning, I'm able to transpose and find alternatives for fingerings much faster and easier.

What attracted you to working with the Montreal Guitar Trio?

Richards: I think our work with the Montreal Guitar Trio takes the whole notion of what can be done with acoustic guitars to a whole other dimension. They're doing completely different things than we are. Our shows together cover an incredible amount of territory. I would like to be in the audiences so I can see what the show is like for them. [laughs] We have lots of guitar players that come up to us after the show who comment on how much fun they have at the shows. It's also a highly accessible show. We all feel like guitar missionaries, playing guitar music for audiences that don't necessarily know anything about guitar music. In a way, we're teaching them about guitar and its many possibilities.

Lams: The combination of their three nylon-string guitars in standard tuning and our three steel-string guitars in new standard tuning creates a sound and texture I haven't heard to this extent before. It's an orchestral sound and we're just starting to see what can be done with it. After we met for the first time, we sent each other pieces and worked out the arrangements. We doubled some parts and octaves, and composed some new parts here and there. When we got together next, it just worked. Anything we needed to change happened very fast. There were no drawn-out rehearsals or discussions. We thought "Wow, this is great. Let's go. Next." Initially, I thought it wasn't going to work because the combination has never been done before, but it worked out great. It came together and mutated into something very cool. There's definitely a little bit of magic happening here.

Bert, give me some insight into the making of *Unnamed Lands*, your new duo album with Tom Griesgraber.

Lams: We worked on it over a period of four years. We did some small house concerts together, during which I would play Bach pieces from my solo album *Nascent* and Tom would play some of his solo work. Then we'd join forces and perform pieces as a duo. Those pieces kept multiplying. Once we wrote a couple of original pieces, we said "Let's make this into an album." It took so long to put together because we each had to work within the right time gaps between our other touring schedules.

We did three or four sessions every day over a period of two weeks. Then we went back and listened to the material and wrote out what we liked on the computer. Then we learned to play it well and sat back down to record it. We wrote the album mostly in the studio. The pieces initially had no names and there was no concept. We just knew we wanted to write some original music.

The guy who mixed the album, Howard Gibbons, gave Tom a book about the early American pioneers. It was a technical book about how to hunt deer, what foodstuffs to bring, and everything else you need to bring on the road. That inspired us and gave us a theme for the album about the early pioneers heading West. The vibe of the music corresponded to that. It had a kind of Americana flavor about it, though we also go a little bit away from that. *Unnamed Lands* emerged as a title and the rest of story did as well. Some of the pieces had the feel of something that happened as the pioneers were traveling. So, we made up stories during the mixing process about the kinds of adventures they were having, like there was a storm coming in and people were getting lost.

The group emerged from esoteric beginnings in Guitar Craft and evolved into something highly accessible. Talk about that transition and how you developed your own distinct audience.

Richards: When we started with Robert Fripp, the focus was all about music, which appealed to me. Robert has such an intense way of diving into music. It inspired us to go as deep into the music as possible. At mealtimes, we'd talk about rhythm and things we noticed while practicing. It was all about improving our playing. There was a spiritual element to Guitar Craft too. Each morning, we would get up and do a half-hour of what was called "morning sitting." It was a meditation in which we would quietly sit together and each go through each part of our body, bringing attention to each muscle and relaxing them. I had never previously experienced that. It made a lot of sense to me that when you're in a relaxed state, you can play the guitar better. Robert had other specific exercises both on and off the guitar that helped us focus our attention for longer periods while playing music.

During our early days, the music we played was largely composed by Robert. It can be very complex and some of it is very experimental. When the California Guitar Trio first performed, we included a lot of that music Robert wrote in our set. During our early Los Angeles gigs, there were quite a few Robert fans in the audience. We gained notoriety because we were his students.

We eventually began developing our own sound. I remember early on Hideyo played "Pipeline" at a rehearsal after we had worked on all of this really complex multi-time signature stuff. It was a kind of release to joke around with him on that piece and it became one of the things we included in our repertoire. It was a break from the intensity of the other music we performed. The combination of those two things—the very complex and intense songs, together with the more accessible pieces—became the fundamental concept for the trio.



With each album and performance, we've developed that more and more. Today, we perform for a lot of people who don't know who Robert is. It was important for us to find a way we could play music we love that was exciting and important, but could also be interesting to people who weren't necessarily King Crimson or guitar fans. That's been really key. Now, we can play in a performing arts center, fill it up, and play for people from all different types of backgrounds. It's a really great thing. We can play experimental and classical music for people that haven't necessarily listened to that kind of stuff before. People can leave the concert feeling like perhaps they learned something and heard music they haven't been exposed to previously. We think this approach will help us carry through the rest of our careers together.

Lams: When we started as a trio, we were still students of Robert Fripp. Our initial repertoire was 99-percent Guitar Craft pieces. So, we played the pieces we did with the League of Crafty Guitarists that we learned from Robert. We did them very well and one by one, we spontaneously added new compositions. One of the first pieces was "Blockhead" which Paul wrote. I started adding classical pieces, especially music by Bach, which created new avenues. Hideyo brought in "Pipeline" by The Ventures as Paul mentioned. After our serious pieces, that made the audience start laughing. So, we now have a great sense of humor happening at our shows too.

At what point did you realize the trio could be a long-term career for all of you?

Richards: Robert was always really supportive of us from the beginning. It first formed in 1991. We were on tour with Robert and the League of Crafty Guitarists. We did a West Coast tour. One day, Robert asked Bert "Who do you really want to play with?" Bert wrote out this long list that included most of the players who were active at that time in the League. Robert said "No, I want you to narrow it down to just a few players." I think Robert knew that he was going to discontinue touring with the League and work more on his King Crimson stuff back in 1990. So, Bert came up with this list that was me, Hideyo and a guy named Steve Jolemore from the East Coast. The four of us had a meeting with Robert and he encouraged us to start working together on a project of our own. Bert invited us to come to Los Angeles, where he recently moved. He started calling our group The California Project. That's kind of where we got the name California Guitar Trio from.

As it turned out, Steve Jolemore couldn't make it because he had Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and had to have surgeries. So, Hideyo and I went to Bert's house in January of 1991 and that's when we formed the trio. In the beginning, it was really, really hard. In LA, there are a million different bands trying to make it. They have a whole "pay to play" system there too, so we weren't making any money at all. We would work together for three or four months at a time in LA and then take a break. I would come back to Utah where I live and work at a guitar store called Guitar City where I was a salesman. So, I earned a bit of money that way. Then I would go back to LA and do another three or four months with the trio. We'd play as many gigs as possible, with a lot of them paying no money at all. We'd do any gig we could get. We played for the Exceptional Children's Foundation for autistic kids numerous times. We played for the homeless. We played at coffee shops. Any place you can think of, we played there.

Robert continued to be very encouraging. When he first saw us play, he was going wild, jumping up and down, screaming, yelling and clapping for us. He told us he thought we had something very special. All the support he gave us was a big help. In 1992, Robert invited us to do a few concerts with his short-lived project The Robert Fripp String Quintet. Then in 1994 and 1995, he asked us to open for King Crimson, which was a huge turning point for us during which we gained a lot of fans. It was during the first tour with King Crimson that I felt this could really turn into something that might last a long time.

It wasn't until around 1998 that we actually got a booking agent that started to book us gigs and tours so we could actually make some money. It took eight years of constant touring and traveling to get us to that point. Even when we traveled with King Crimson, part of the deal with us was that we had to pay our way. We didn't get paid anything to do the shows. We just had the opportunity to perform. We paid our way by selling CDs. We'd go out to the lobby after the shows and sell our CDs to pay for our hotel rooms, flights and rental cars.

By 1999, we started getting more consistent gigs that let us say "Okay, we're now at a point where we're starting to earn a living from this." It got to the point where we made enough money that I could quit my job at the guitar store. Prior to that, between the tours, I was still going back to the guitar shop. They were nice enough to keep having me back. [laughs] In 2001, we started working with SRO, the agent we use to this day. That was a huge leap for us and they have been consistently getting us gigs and keeping us busy and touring for more than 10 years.

Lams: We always went with the flow. I'm very proud that we've always gone with the opportunities presented to us. We haven't had many second thoughts about them. We've taken some huge risks. For instance, Robert Fripp in the early '90s convinced us to go to Japan. We had to pay our own way. He said "If you show up, you might be able to open up for me and David Sylvian during our tour." So, we bought our tickets to Japan, showed up, and the Japanese promoter said "No, we don't see a need for you." I remember Robert going into the room next door with the promoter and when they came out, we became the opening act. [laughs] It looked like we weren't going to get it, but we took the opportunity and it opened a new door for us.

Is the group a democratic entity?

Lams: I don't like that word. [laughs] Usually, when one of us says "no" then it's no. I guess that's democratic. When one of us feels strongly about something, we'll probably go in that direction. Decisions are pretty easy that way. There isn't just one person in charge of the musical or practical decisions we have to make, including how many months we'll spend on the road. It's all decided together. I remember sitting on a tour bus with Robert Fripp many years ago. We got an email about some concert we were asked to do and we all decided in about 10 seconds whether the answer would be yes or no. I remember Robert commenting "Usually, any band would have discussions for an hour or two about that. It shows that you're a good band because you're very fast with decisions."

Richards: It can be hard when things go wrong after a group decision, but we take things one day at a time and don't get too upset about them. We used to call Bert "St. Bert" because he was the most gentle and understanding character during the Guitar Craft courses. That influence carried over to the three of us. I'm the one who gets more emotional about things. Bert keeps things really calm and never freaks out too much. I think a lot of groups break up because they can't work together on a very basic level. That's been one of the main keys to our success and ability to stay together. We listen to each other. Our decision-making process has taken us down some interesting paths and they don't always work. I do a lot of the management stuff, working directly with our agent on things. But we all have input into musical directions, as well as ordinary things like tour routing. The important thing is we don't have any of the ego issues you so often hear about, in which someone in a group feels they are more important than the other or demands a higher royalty rate. We've never had any of those issues.

What's your perspective on trying to generate revenue from recordings in these complex times?

Richards: When we first started playing together, our CDs were released on Robert Fripp's label Discipline Global Mobile, which had major distribution. We sold quite a few CDs going through that traditional route. But now, people are buying fewer CDs, so that's become much more of a challenge. We're always having to find ways to adapt to the new situation. One of the ways that's been working well is that we often bring a recording setup with us on tour. We have a CD duplicator and right after the show, we sell recordings of it. The other thing we do is pursue creative ways of keeping people interested in buying things, rather than downloading them for free. We did the whole Kickstarter-style revenue model for the *Andromeda* album, which was very successful.

In terms of online revenue, iTunes remains our biggest source of income. Amazon MP3 is second and Amazon On Demand is third. The streaming services are down at the very bottom. The criticism of Spotify I've seen from artists has been spot on. The fact that it's backed by the major labels and the low percentages artists get is pretty scary. The one thing that is sort of working in that realm is Pandora. The revenue we make is hugely different, but we also receive a lot more plays there. During the 2012 holiday season, our Christmas album received millions of plays on Pandora, for which we received \$6,000. That isn't a lot of money considering the number of plays, but it's better than nothing. Pandora is a bit better for artists because you can't call up specific tunes or albums. It's more akin to regular radio play.

One of the best pieces of advice we took was from Robert Fripp. When we were putting out our third album, we were offered a big record deal with Polygram. Philip Glass had a Polygram-based label called Point Music and they made a really nice offer. Robert agreed to look at the contract for us. When he got to the clause which stated the label keeps copyright in everything we do for a certain number of years, he wrote "Fuck you!" in the column next to it and told us to tear it up and send it back to them. It was pretty funny to get this contract from Robert Fripp with "Fuck you!" on it. Obviously, we didn't take that deal and Point Music went down quickly. We would have been stuck if we had signed with them and not had access to those albums. When we have put something out through a record label, we've been careful not to give away our copyrights. At this moment, we have ownership of our whole back catalog, which we have loaded ourselves into iTunes and TuneCore. We get a fair amount of income through those vehicles. I can also see for myself how many copies are being sold. It has been a great thing for us to keep our own copyright and I have no doubt we will keep going that way.

Lams: On the streaming front, I can only see advantages for us, because the people that stream our music are people who may start checking us out in other ways. They might become our friends on Facebook. They might sign up for our email list. They might come out to our live shows. I don't really see any disadvantages for us, because we're working without a manager. Paul is kind of officially the manager of the group. So, we have to make the most of every opportunity available to us.

I understand how horrible it can be to work on a project for years and then have someone just downloading it for nothing or hearing it with degraded sound quality. I'm indignant about it as well, but the only way to approach it is to find a positive way to work within the reality. Otherwise, you become bitter about it. You have to find opportunities within these new technologies. Today, fans can be in direct contact with you. It's not like the old days where things were lofty, in which you had no idea who was involved in the groups you like. The music and personalities were separate. Now, fans can be personally involved with the music they love. A lot of people have become fans of the group through these new means and I think it has been a great thing.

THE MUSICAL BOX

MUSINGS ON MUSIC FROM CENTRAL KENTUCKY AND BEYOND

in performance: california guitar trio

{ September 14, 2012 @ 1:01 am } ·



Half the fun of a concert by the California Guitar Trio comes from scanning the reactions of patrons witnessing the group for the first time. Last night's convocation performance at Berea College's Phelps Stokes Auditorium was full of rookie fans – students, primarily – and their enthusiasm magnified the already hearty sense of stylistic thrillseeking that distinguishes the CGT's best music.

Don't get us wrong. Guitarists Paul Richards, Bert Lams and Hideyo Moriya still ran the show with extraordinary technical command that was balanced by a thoroughly unassuming stage demeanor. Such a blend made the performance's most daring and varied feats – including a Bach prelude played with a circulation technique, a dizzying, clap-a-long take on the surf classic *Misirlou* and a joyride of fuzzy, rockish guitar play that detoured into country cantina music during the CGT's own *Train to Lamy Suite* – sound like parts of a singular language that served very much as a native tongue for the players.

Surf next to psychedelia? Classical next to Spaghetti Western themes? Pink Floyd next to Bach? You mean a guitar performance isn't supposed to be like that?

The crowd almost seemed to think as much at first as it attentively but quietly greeted cyclical passages that recalled one of the CGT's earliest influences, British guitarist Robert Fripp, during the show-opening original *Yamanashi Blues*. But Moriya's assertive surf lead on *Walk Don't Run*, Richards' graceful slide work during *Sleepwalk* and Lams' classical command of Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* collectively seemed to open up the audience up to the trio's almost giddy sense of genre jumping.

Perhaps the most obvious common ground shared by audience and artist materialized during the Queen classic *Bohemian Rhapsody*. The trio's very faithful treatment of the tune has been part of its repertoire for well over a decade. And usually the inevitable (and encouraged) audience sing-a-long that ensues is measured by the level of alcohol consumed. Last night's crowd reaction, though, was booze-free and beautifully pure. The student populace, which obviously embraced the 37 year old song as if it were a current radio hit, sang, cheered, laughed and broke into applause as the music hit its familiar mock-operatic crescendo. It was quite a moment.

What do you do to top that? Why, you send your crowd home with an encore of *Happy Trails*, performed as a warm and cordial coda for a performance that affectionately shattered stylistic expectations of what acoustic guitar concerts can and should approximate.

meet walter tunis



I am a native Kentuckian and freelance journalist who has been writing about contemporary music for the Lexington Herald-Leader since 1980. I have not a lick of honest musical talent myself, just a pair of appreciative ears for jazz, folk, blues, bluegrass, Americana, soul, Celtic, Cajun, chamber, worldbeat, nearly every form of rock 'n' roll imaginable and, when pressed, the occasional tango and polka.

<http://musicalbox.bloginky.com/2012/09/14/in-performance-california-guitar-trio-4/>



California Guitar Trio serves up a world of six-string influences

CALIFORNIA GUITAR TRIO

JULY 2, 2012

BY: BRIAN MCCOY



There's nothing particularly novel in hearing a musician speak of the chemistry that exists among members of his current group. From the classiest chamber ensemble to the angriest punk band, such emotional and musical connections are essential.

That said, it's hard not to be impressed when Bert Lams speaks of the [California Guitar Trio's](#) chemistry. Geography provides part of the reason, seeing as how the musicians hail from three distinct continents and cultures.

"That makes for an interesting chemistry and different influences that naturally tie into the music," the Belgian-born Lams told me in an interview a few years back. "Yet one of the elements that brought us together at the same time was our common love of classical music and classical arrangements."

From that background, the trio – Tokyo guitarist Hideyo Moriya and Salt Lake City's Paul Richards round out the lineup – has found an international audience for an acoustic sound that touches on everything from jazz and classical to contemporary pop.

The [California Guitar Trio](#) comes to Northern California next week for a series of dates. The group performs July 10 at Don Quixote's in Felton, July 11 at [Yoshi's](#) in Oakland, July 12-13 at California Worldfest in Grass Valley and July 14 at the [Sutter Creek](#) Theatre in Sutter Creek.

The group's latest album, the all-classical "Masterworks," features the trio's arrangements of works by Bach, Barber, Schubert and Vivaldi, among others. The project also marks the latest chapter in their long association with bass giant [Tony Levin](#).

Lams, Moriya and Richards first met Levin – and each other – during the four years they spent in Seattle in the 1980s as part of King Crimson guitarist Robert Fripp's League of Crafty Guitarists. When Fripp disbanded the collective, he encouraged his student-musicians to form their own groups. Lams, Moriya and Richards took him up on the idea.

"We pretty much stayed for a long period of time (in Seattle) and that was really our strong foundation," Lams told me. "We had no reputation but from one thing came another."

The trio released its debut album, "Yamanashi Blues," in 1993 and the near-20 years since have seen them issue both studio efforts ("Invitation," "Pathways," a holiday disc) and live shows (including a two-CD set from San Francisco's Great American Music Hall).

From Northern California, the group will travel to Italy for a series of dates. Those will be followed by a string of Stateside concerts running through the fall. Lams noted that when it comes to performances, on-stage chemistry is only half the equation.

"A lot of it depends on the energy of the audience," he said. "We never know what to expect."

<http://www.examiner.com/article/california-guitar-trio-serves-up-a-world-of-six-string-influences>

MUSIC BLOG

Concert Review: California Guitar Trio At The State Room

by Dan Nailen

POSTED // 2011-10-28 –



In a performance that bounced between classical and rock, the California Guitar Trio celebrated 20 years of playing together with a stellar, packed show at The State Room Thursday night.

I didn't make it to see the whole gig (tethered as I was to my couch as the insane World Series game played out), but what I did see was exactly as advertised: virtuoso performances by three amazingly talented players, plus a major assist by opening act/guitar wiz Fareed Haque.

The group's current tour is a celebration of two decades together, and they worked from a set list careful to touch on all aspects of their lengthy career. It didn't really matter, though, whether or not one was familiar with their oeuvre, because the skills on display via Hideyo Moriya of Tokyo, Bert Lams of Belgium and Salt Lake City's own Paul Richards are enough to impress anyone within earshot.

As I walked in, the Trio was working over Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody," with the audience singing all of Freddie Mercury's lines to the delight of the musicians on stage. It was a treat, but not as much as the songs from *Andromeda*, the Trio's most recent studio release. The title track was a particularly strong performance toward the end of the band's set.

For an encore, the Trio welcomed opener Haque to the stage, creating a magical quartet, particularly when Haque added the punch of an electric guitar to the Trio's three acoustics. Haque's jazz and classical background obviously fits naturally with the Trio, and together they were excellent on a version of Vivaldi's "Winter" from The Four Seasons, and a California Guitar Trio oldie, "Blockhead."

Naturally, I was kicking myself for being late to the show, but the good thing about having one-third of this globe-sprawling band living in Utah is, you know there will always be another chance. Here's hoping the Cali Guitar Trio bring Haque with them next time, too.

<http://www.cityweekly.net/utah/blog-3455-6562-music-blog-concert-review-california-guitar-trio-at-the-state-room.html>



Concert review: California Guitar Trio connects with fans at the Old Rock House, Friday, March 18

Written by [Matt Champion](#)

Monday, 21 March 2011 13:04

Most of us remember a time when we would throw together a mixtape of random songs that went well together either for ourselves or as gifts for friends. Friday night at the [Old Rock House](#), the [California Guitar Trio](#) gave us that gift in both a live performance and a CD. The band took the stage right around 8:30 p.m. and within the first 5 seconds of "Cathedral Peak," I knew we were in for an amazing show. The trio is well known for its diverse set list, and tonight's show was no different.

The musicians moved between musical genres without missing a beat, stringing together different styles of music both from song to song and within the same tune like master artisans creating an intricate beaded necklace. Their innate ability to shift musical genres without hesitation and talent at adapting pieces to guitar is amazing, as seen in their adaptations of Bach's "Prelude" and "Tocatta and Fugue." They also have no trouble recreating a full-band sound as well, as heard in their versions of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" and the Ventures classic "Walk, Don't Run," which took on a new life while staying true to the original tunes.

The best part of the California Guitar Trio live experience is simply watching it perform. The quality of musicianship and technical skill present in this group is simply astonishing. There were multiple times throughout the evening where I was literally astounded at what I was seeing and hearing. Paul Richards acted as emcee for the evening, his soft-spoken tone and sense of humor added a lot to the overall experience along with his rock-solid rhythm parts and fantastic slide playing. Bert Lams took the most complicated and intricate parts and played them with such lightness and ease it was as if he were just taking a leisurely stroll through the park. My favorite of the group was Hideyo Moriya, keeping the rhythm going as if he were wired to an atomic clock and running up and down the frets faster than Michael Johnson on a sugar high.

My personal favorite was the band's rendition of the classic Pink Floyd tune "Echoes." Paul did a fantastic emulation of David Gilmour's slide playing while Bert was obviously channeling the spirit of Richard Wright when covering his adaptation of the keyboard parts while Hideyo was covering for both Roger Waters and Nick Mason, nailing the beat dead on. I also enjoyed their rendition of the Santo and Johnny classic "Sleepwalk," with Hideyo covering Johnny Farina's guitar while Paul and Bert worked in tandem to recreate Santo Farina's superb steel guitar sound.

Over the course of the evening, one thing was clear: the band's appreciation of its fans, which began with sincere thanks throughout the show and culminated in the band burning and selling CDs of the show afterwards. I thought that offering a keepsake of the evening was a fantastic way for the band to give thanks to its fans in a personal way. I also thought it was great to see Hideyo and Paul man the CD burning station. It was profound to see them make music on the stage then make music at the merch booth. The trio promised to return to St. Louis and I can definitely say that I'll be picking up my tickets the day they go on sale.

<http://kdhx.org/music/reviews/concert-review-california-guitar-trio-connects-with-fans-at-the-old-rock-house-friday-march-18>

Artists

CALIFORNIA GUITAR TRIO

BILL ELLISON

42 MARCH 2011 GUITARPLAYER.COM

BY DARRIN FOX

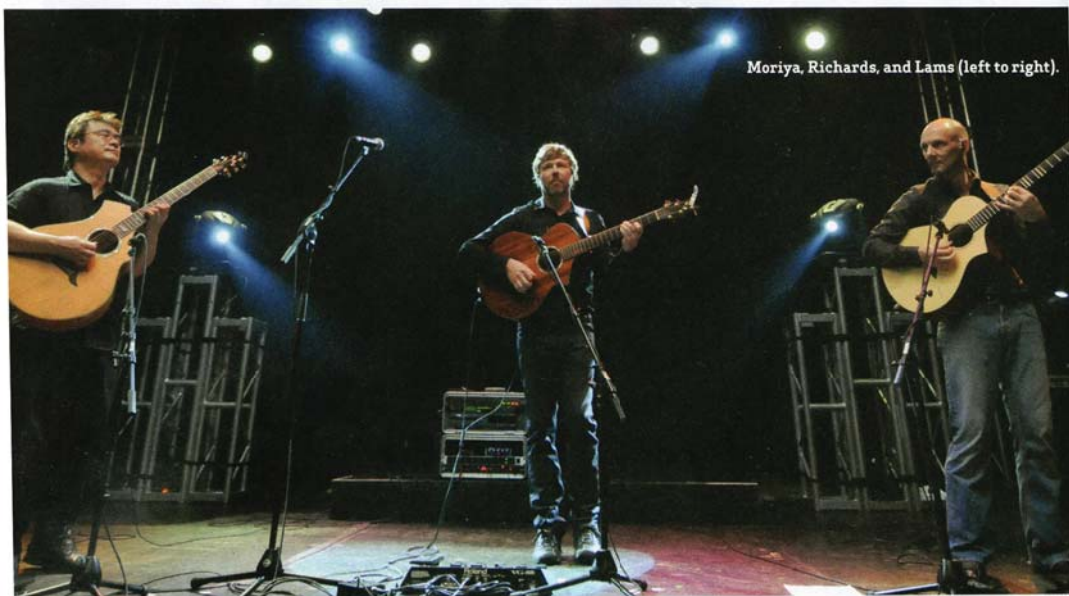
“WE

try to not get locked into specific recipes of working and being creative,” says California Guitar Trio’s Paul Richards. “Our recipe is the way we play and sound together.” For 20 years, Richards, Bert Lams, and Hideyo Moriya have cooked up a highly successful oeuvre, with 13 albums and an incessant touring schedule that has taken the group the world over. The trio’s inspired, progressive instrumental take on classical, jazz, rock, pop, even surf (thanks to Moriya, the trio’s resident surf guitar

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Artists

CALIFORNIA GUITAR TRIO



Moriya, Richards, and Lams (left to right).

expert and the shyest member of the group), is simultaneously serious and deliberate—much like their old teacher Robert Fripp—and playful, no matter how cerebral the composition or arrangement. Not bad for three dudes who met at Fripp's Guitar Craft course in 1987. *Andromeda* [Innerknot], the California Guitar Trio's latest effort, not only shows them to be in top form, it proves to be their best album yet as the group flexes its compositional muscles while indulging its improvisational urges.

Andromeda contains all original compositions—a first for you guys—and also a lot of improvised pieces.

Lams: Yes, we feel that the improvisations create a great contrast with the compositions. We toured the composed

songs for two weeks before we tracked them, so we were ready to lay them down. And it was fun having the improv in there. Each record is so different. I can't listen to an album of ours until at least five years after we're done with it, even *Andromeda*. I can't listen to it yet because I instantly recall making the music, the situation, the mixing process, everything. I can't listen in an objective way. In general, however, it was a really fun and spontaneous project, and we worked very fast and creatively.

The track "Improv VIII" has a Les Paul, speed-up tape thing going on. What's the story behind that?

Richards: It started out as a single-line circulation. Circulation is a concept we learned in Guitar Craft, where each player

takes one note of a melody and then passes it on, allowing the melody to circle around to each of the players. We did choose a key, in this case C minor, and then we played a circulation to create a basis. Then we backed up the tape—we actually recorded onto analog tape—and began layering improvisations over the top. After a few takes of that, our engineer said we should slow the tape machine down to half speed like Les Paul, and layer over that. In a way, it's our tribute to Les Paul. We toyed with the idea of calling it "Tribute to Les Paul," but the music is just too different sounding than anything he did, so we decided against it.

The track "Hazardous Z" is a standout as well.

Richards: Yeah, that one started out with Hideyo, who wrote out three parts and sent them to us while we were on a break from the road. When we got it, Bert and I adapted the parts to fit our own styles, and it changed the piece pretty radically. Bert pulled out his nylon string and played in an almost flamenco style. So I latched on to that feel as well, and added an almost flamenco-style rhythm. But since neither of us are flamenco players, it came out with a completely different feel. You have to be open to going

anywhere the creative process and the music take you.

What are some of your individual specialties as guitarists, and are there any examples of them on *Andromeda*?

Richards: We've developed as a group, but our personal styles have also developed over the years. For example, Hideyo is the fastest player. You can really hear that on the solo at the end of "Portland Rain," where he tears it up. Bert has a classical guitar background, and if you hear any fingerstyle, classical-oriented playing, it's him. In contrast, however, Bert also plays a lot of energetic, distorted solos on *Andromeda*. As for me, I like to play slide, and you can hear it on "Middle of TX." Keep in mind that these are small, very general examples of what we do differently from each other.

Lams: We're three very different personalities and we had styles and experiences that we developed before we met at Guitar Craft. I studied classical guitar and I had that ingrained in my body. Hideyo is a very different musician having played a lot of percussion in his life. You can really hear that rhythmic drive in his playing.

Moriya: I started playing guitar and drums at age 12, copying the Ventures' "Pipeline." I think learning the tremolo and glissando techniques in that music made me a faster picker. And playing drums made me listen to the drum parts as much as the guitar parts in music. I like to make the guitar groove as if a drummer is playing it.

What did you guys use to record the new album?

Richards: Everything on the album, even the distorted stuff, is acoustic guitar. I think a lot of people hear our music and assume that since there's distortion, there must be some electric guitar in there, but we use Roland VG-88s and VG-99s for distortion. I used my Breedlove A12 Auditorium Custom and Hideyo used a Breedlove CM Custom. Bert played an acoustic guitar made by Ed Golden on most of the record.

Are you happier with the tone of an amplified acoustic guitar now than you were, say, 20 years ago?

Richards: Acoustic guitar amplification is an ever-evolving technology, and we're always evolving what we use, as well. Over 20 years of playing together, I'd estimate that we've used more than a dozen different pickups. In fact, we're going through another evolution now, switching from RMC pickups to the L.R. Baggs Anthem system.

Lams: The trick with pickups is getting good dynamics when you're amplified,

which was lacking with previous systems. The Anthem has an internal microphone, which gives us more dynamics and transparency than just a piezo, because you get some of that natural guitar sound. The mic doesn't sound weird and nasal like a lot of internal mics. In the end, for us it's about finding something that sounds good in all of the different types of venues we play in. For example, one night we're in a club, the next night a church, and the next night a theatre, a conference room, a hotel, or a house. For what we do, we have to be able to transfer the dynamics to the audience, and the bigger the venue gets, the harder that is to do. Our concerts are really an experience in dynamics more than anything else.

Richards: Playing the acoustic guitar live is always a compromise. If you sit in a room listening to us play acoustically, it sounds completely different than when we go through a P.A. system. We want to retain the acoustic qualities of our guitars, but we need a pickup that works well with our effects and distortion too. When CGT started out, we were using Ovation's, which we played with Robert Fripp—it was the League of Crafty Guitarists standard-issue guitar. They worked very well and they have a certain clarity and definition, but they have plastic backs and that plastic sound to them. Since then we've used Martins, Taylors, custom guitars, and lots of different pickups, trying to get a nice amplified tone that works well with distortion. Believe me, it's hard to find the perfect acoustic guitar that you can also play with lots of distortion [laughs].

In *Andromeda*'s liner notes you thank Hiroshi Iketani for your picks. What are they?

Richards: We started using these triangular picks that Robert Fripp gave us when we were in Guitar Craft. A German company called Herdim made them from a material called India rubber. Unfortunately, Herdim went out of business, so we had to find something like them because we were all relying on them. They allow for really precise picking, and their tone is very clean, clear, and bright. Hiroshi Iketani makes something very close to the Herdim, so we use those, but they aren't cheap—about \$2 apiece. People ask for picks after the show and we say, "no way!"

Does Guitar Craft still inform what CGT does?

Richards: Oh yeah. It provided a very strong foundation and basis for pretty much everything we've been doing for 20 years, and it set the format for our working together. Robert has a unique way of work-

ing that is very serious and focused on the music and playing together as a group. For example, the whole circulation technique he came up with is really a tool that forces you to listen to the other players.

After 20 years, how do you guys keep it fresh?

Lams: We've spent a lot of time on the road together, and you really get to know people that way. The biggest thing is giving each other space—both musically and personally. A couple of years ago we started getting separate hotel rooms, because when you're onstage together and driving in the van together, you need that breather from each other. We still go out and eat together and hang out. It's a fine balance, especially when you find yourself in a stressful situation, which happens on the road a lot. ■

MORE ONLINE



- Watch CGT's stellar performance of "Andromeda."
- CGT are joined live by Tony Levin and Pat Mastelotto.
- See the CGT cover "Bohemian Rhapsody" live.

www.guitarplayer.com/march2011



by Adam Rauf; Published Monday, January 10th, 2011 at 5:48pm

CALIFORNIA GUITAR TRIO INTERVIEW

California Guitar Trio features three immensely talented and intriguing guitar aficionados from far reaching corners of the Globe. CGT is Paul Richards of Salt Lake City, Utah, Bert Lams of Brussels, Belgium, and Hideyo Moriya of Tokyo, Japan. The band first met in England at Guitar Craft Courses hosted by Robert Fripp in the late 80s. Richards, Lams, and Moriya attended several of these intensive Fripp classes before touring worldwide with Fripp's League of Crafty Guitarists. Formal inception of The California Guitar Trio occurred in 1991 and the rest is history as the group has toured the world around, performing with legendary artists in dozens of countries, mesmerizing vast audiences with their intricate classical reworkings of progressive jazz, blues, surf tunes, and original compositions.

Blow The Scene Senior Staff Writer, Adam Rauf recently caught up with all three members of The California Guitar Trio for a full feature interview as Bert Lams, Hideyo Moriya, and Paul Richards discuss tour life, studying with Robert Fripp, their latest full-length *Andromeda* on Karate Body Records, and much more!

Adam Rauf (Blow The Scene): How did you guys all meet and decide to jam together? Presumably, Fripp's school is pretty selective about the talent, but what else brought you guys together?

Paul Richards: We met in 1987 while studying music with Robert Fripp on a series of "Guitar Craft" courses that were held in Europe. The three of us were part of the "League of Crafty Guitarists" which was a sort of guitar orchestra with Robert and the students. We did many performances in Europe and the USA with the League. The three of us became quite good friends during this time. And musically, one of the things that drew Bert, Hideyo and I together was our interest in playing classical music, which was a bit of an anomaly in the League.

Adam BTS: What was different about recording *Andromeda* compared to your other albums?

Paul Richards: *Andromeda* is the first CGT album of only original music written by Bert, Hideyo and myself. All of our previous albums featured a mixture of arrangements, covers, original, and classical music. We've always enjoyed experimenting with blending electronic effects with our acoustic guitars, and I think we've taken this to a more extreme level with *Andromeda*. We recorded the album using vintage analog equipment in a studio in Louisville Kentucky which helped get some great acoustic guitar sounds. We used various digital and analog effects to modify the acoustic sounds to produce a wider variety of sounds and textures. No electric guitars were used, although you may find that hard to believe when listening to the album. This is also the first album that we have released on vinyl through karatebodyrecords.com

Adam BTS: Were you worried at all about the audience and critical response to an all-originals record?

Bert Lams: The most critical response is our own. If the music resonates with us, we know it will speak to our audience. In the past twenty years we have always pursued the music that we really love to play, and the audience responds to that. I believe that real artistry hinges on this principle.

Adam BTS: What is the writing process like for you guys? Do you just jam and see what comes out, or do you prepare scores for each other?

Bert Lams: it goes many different ways. For most of the pieces one of the Trio members will come up with a basic idea for us to work on. It is not always easy; sometimes an idea takes off and a piece is written very quickly. Sometimes an idea resonates but it takes a while, and some struggling for it to take a final shape. We 'test' a lot of our originals in front of the audience! They often provide us with the needed feedback to make a piece work.

And sometimes a piece is all written out—on our latest CD, Hideyo wrote a piece called *Hazardous Z*—he sent us a score. Paul and I then adapted the score to fit with the ideas we had for the piece. To me, the real magic usually happens when we are all in the same room.

Adam BTS: How much time do you guys actually spend with each other when not writing/recording/performing? Are there any places you guys like to go hang out?

Paul Richards: When we are not on tour, Hideyo lives to Japan, Bert lives on the East coast, and I live in Utah. We are in touch on an almost daily basis, working together via the internet on music and business. While we are on tour, we are together most of the time. It wasn't until just a few years ago that we could afford separate hotel rooms. Before that we were all piling into one room, so we were together ALL of the time! After all these years, we are still very good friends, and go for dinner together and even spend our days off together. As for places we like to go hang out, it depends on where we are. One of our favorite places is Ristorante Il Teatro Le Capitole in Quebec City Canada.

Adam BTS: What's it like working with Tony Levin?

Paul Richards: Tony is one of the most amazing musicians on the planet. His playing always touches my heart. Every time we play together I feel like I learn something from him in a musical way. He's a great guy too, and fun to spend time with. He doesn't seem to mind scaling down to our level of touring after he's just been on the private jet, 5 star hotel tours with Peter Gabriel. And he also loves the Ristorante Il Teatro Le Capitole in Quebec City, where we've been together many times.

Adam BTS: What kind of venues do you guys like playing in the most? Theatres, bars, clubs, house parties? Which has the most receptive audience?

Bert Lams: We really enjoy the challenge of playing in different situations. In any given tour we may find ourselves playing a festival for several thousands of people (like last year in Quebec City), and the next week we might play a small club on a Monday evening for a handful of people. It makes no difference to me; we need to give our best to the people that came to see us.

With CGT we are fortunate to play different venues every day and that makes our life interesting.

Adam BTS: For the gearheads out there, what effects do you guys like using live?

Bert Lams: We mainly rely on the sound of our acoustic guitar: Breedlove custom guitars.

Paul and I are experimenting with a new guitar pick up system (LR Baggs-Anthem).

Hideyo uses a Roland VG 99 with a RMC hex pickup.

Paul uses a Roland GT-6 multi effects pedal board and an Eventide Time Factor.

Bert is using an Eventide Eclipse and a few stompboxes: a Kraken distortion pedal, built by my friends at Full Custom Music in Harrisburg, and an MXR distortion and compressor.

In addition to the pickups we also use Beyer M190 microphones on the guitars.

All three guitars go into an Eventide Eclipse unit—we use a swept reverb setting on this.

We also use an in-ear monitoring system, so we don't need any monitors on stage (saves a lot of time during sound check!)

Adam BTS: What kind of bands do you like playing with? Is it a nice change of pace to play with a heavier band, or do you prefer playing with acoustic acts?

Paul Richards: Over the years, we have played with just about every kind of band that you can imagine, and maybe even a few that you can't. King Crimson, Stickmen and Steve Lukather were the loudest bands we've played with and I was happy that we played before instead of after them! Acoustic acts are generally preferred as openers, but it really depends on the act. The best opening acts are the ones that genuinely warm up the audience. Playing just the right amount of time, just the right volume, getting the audience ready to hear more music. I can often tell how well the opening set went by the way the room feels when I walk out on stage for our set. And it's also possible to see how well the opener does by their CD sales after the show. We are always happy when the opener sells lots of CDs!

Adam BTS: Do you feel that the internet [and music sharing] has helped or hurt you guys as far as sales and concert attendance goes?

Paul Richards: One of the positive aspects of the internet is that it has allowed us a much more direct connection with the fans. People can buy CDs and downloads directly from us on our website. And with Facebook and Twitter, we can keep in closer contact with the people who like to come to our shows. This has definitely helped our concert attendance. As for music sharing, I'm sure we lose sales to people who download our music for free on the internet. There are ongoing arguments on both sides which seem to me to be unending. At the moment, instead of putting my energy into arguing about it, I prefer to find positive ways to deal with the situation. One thing that we are currently doing that works really well: We tour with high quality recording equipment and a CD duplication tower. We record the shows and then duplicate the CDs at the merchandise table. The audience can buy a CD of the show they've just seen immediately after the show. This has helped increase our sales at shows. For the *Andromeda* CD, we put a lot of time into making the CD packaging really nice. And by doing things like offering it on vinyl, we hope to encourage people to buy the album rather than just download it for free.

Adam BTS: Who were your idols growing up?

Hideyo Moriya: When I start to play a guitar, The Ventures was my hero at age 12, my interest was focused on instrumental group. Then I saw the Beatles "A hard days night" on TV at age 14, they became my hero after that. I bought one album every month with my friend, since I didn't have a money around that time.

Bert Lams: First music that really hit me: "Venus" by Shocking Blue (a Dutch band), and the "Four Seasons" by Vivaldi. I taught myself how to play the guitar by playing in a local blues/rock band, and by meticulously copying solos by John Fogerty ("I Heard it through the Grapevine", and "Suzy Q"), and of course, Ritchie Blackmore (Deep Purple-Made in Japan). Later on I listened a lot to classical guitarist Julian Bream.

Paul Richards: When I was around 10 years old, the first two guitarist that I remember that really struck me were Brian May and Joe Walsh. At 13, I saw Alex Lifeson with Rush play on their Hemispheres tour, and it was at that concert that I knew for a certainty that I wanted to be a musician. Steve Howe and Jimmy Page were also very influential when I was a teenager. Around 18 years old, I began listening to a much wider variety of music and musicians including John Coltrane, Miles Davis, John McLaughlin, and of course Robert Fripp and King Crimson and on and on.

Adam BTS: If I recall, I thought all of you guys were married or in a long-term relationship at least. How does being on the road affect that, are they cool with it or is it pretty hard?

Bert Lams: My wife hates me being away, but on the other hand she understands that this is what I love to do and she tries to cope with it. We aim to keep our tours reasonable: two weeks out is fine,

three weeks is great, four weeks is long, five weeks is too long, any longer than that is bad for us and our soul mates...On rare occasions we fly our wives out for a few days—it makes a big difference if we can break up longer tours with a visit, especially if we happen to be in a nice place!

Paul Richards: It's always hard to be away for long periods of time. Only a very special woman can be okay being told time after time by her husband "good bye, see you in a month". My wife likes to come along when possible, especially when we are going to places like Tokyo, Paris and New York.

Adam BTS: What was your favorite show to play to date? If not a show, perhaps which country you like touring the most?

Hideyo Moriya: Beside USA, it is nice to play in Italy, the audiences are very enthusiastic and food is good. One down point is we always play late at night.

Bert Lams: Though I love touring in Italy, South America and Japan, my favorite place to tour is the US. We have a loyal fan base here, and I enjoy touring and knowing that I'm still 'home'. On the other hand I quite like to explore new places: last year we played a festival in New Zealand. It was awesome. I'm looking forward to a short tour in South America in May with the CGT as well. Adventure calls.

Paul Richards: One of the most spectacular shows that we've done was in Quebec City, playing the summer festival there for about 60,000 people. Although, I have to say that it wasn't my "favorite" show because it was so overwhelming playing in front of that many people, it was difficult to actually enjoy the experience. Austin Texas is one of my favorite places to play, we've had many great shows there. And I agree with Hideyo and Bert about Italy, and Japan too.

Adam BTS: How long had you guys been playing before studying under the tutelage of Robert Fripp?

Hideyo Moriya: I played guitar perhaps 18 years before Guitar Craft, but it doesn't count any advantage.

Bert Lams: I had been playing for about twelve years—the last six years of that I studied classical guitar at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels. I was a full time classical guitar teacher in Brussels before I moved to the US.

Paul Richards: I was 21 years old when I began studying with Robert Fripp on the Guitar Craft Courses, so I had only been playing guitar for 8 years at that point.

Adam BTS: What was it like to get taught by Fripp? Did he give you any words of wisdom that still stick today?

Bert Lams: It was an incredible experience. It was 'hands on' and very direct—like an apprentice would learn from a craftsman—directly from experience. For instance: In 1989 I was invited to attend a 'performance course'. I had no idea what this was going to be all about; when I showed up we were told we were going on tour for six weeks: we travelled Europe on a school bus in the midst of a brutal winter. Robert is a true gentleman, and a generous, supportive friend. I feel privileged that I was able to be his apprentice.

Paul Richards: Studying with Robert changed my life. I wouldn't be playing with the CGT if I hadn't taken the decision to study with him. He takes guitar playing seriously, and is very good at sharing his many years of experience with others. He's very "in the moment" and depending on the situation, I've seen him be very demanding, and uncompromising. At other times, he's one of the funniest most entertaining persons I've ever met. Robert has been very kind, generous and supportive of the CGT. He taught us a lot about the music industry and always encouraged us to keep the copyrights for our music. Which has literally been one of the most valuable bits of advice we've taken from him. When things go wrong as a result of bad decisions made, I often hear his words in my mind: "you do shitty things for as long as you do shitty things", or put positively, "You do what is Right when you accept nothing less than what is Right". While I continue to work on this principle of accepting nothing less than what is right, I'm happy to have his words ringing in my ears!

Adam BTS: What's your favorite type of food [or restaurant] to get on the road?

Hideyo Moriya: Asian restaurants are good with me. But, any type of local favorite restaurant is also very good.

Bert Lams: I like home cooked food, and am always really happy when one of our friends serves us a home cooked meal.

Paul Richards: I like to watch the food network and I like to cook. When we are on the road, I use Urban Spoon iPhone app to help find good restaurants. And I have a list of places that Guy Fieri (from Diners, Drive-ins and Dives) has visited across the country, and we've been to quite a few of them. On many days, we have very difficult schedules, traveling to the next city and playing shows, so we have very limited time to eat. We often take what we can easily find easily, which can be very hit and miss.

Adam BTS: Who gets to do the driving, or do you split it pretty evenly?

Bert Lams: Paul and I do most of the driving these days. Hideyo is responsible for guiding us to our destination with his GPS system.

Adam BTS: If you all were to throw down in a game of Scrabble, who would win?

Paul Richards: I am the only one in the band that likes to play Scrabble! If we were playing in Flemish, Bert would win. If we were playing in Japanese, Hideyo would win. If we were playing in English, while Hideyo's English is quite good, I think that Bert would give me the biggest challenge, and perhaps he could even win!

Published Tuesday, November 30th, 2010 at 2:02 pm

Andromeda

California Guitar Trio

Karate Body Records & Inner Knot - 2010

Genres: Acoustic, minimalist, progressive instrumental rock

RIYL: Steve Reich, Andreas Kapsalis/Goran Ivanovic, John Fahey

7.6

If **Robert Fripp** was your guitar teacher, it's very likely that you're a very accomplished guitarist. And **California Guitar Trio** (CGT) are no exception; **Bert Lams**, **Paul Richards**, and **Hideyo Moriya** have been going strong for over 19 years and will surprise very few with *Andromeda*, their latest recorded effort. Point of interest being, that this is **CGT's** first record to feature absolutely no covers, and the original works are stacked with a slew of improvisational pieces.

The trio often performs live with three acoustic guitars, as their technical mastery is what has wowed audiences over the years. But on *Andromeda*, they allow themselves to use as much of the studio as possible. There's plenty of effects (perhaps paying attention to their prog roots and **King Crimson** connection), atmospheric keyboard textures (also called "pads," very appropriate for *Andromeda*), electric guitars, bass, and even percussion. This helps keep the original compositions interesting. **Tony Levin** of **King Crimson** joins as a guest musician on the record, as he has in previous albums, which is a nice touch.

The minute the 10/8 lick of opener "Cathedral Peak" opens, you might think you have a modern punk or rock riff, but then they disappear into their progressive rock licks and open a brand new soundscape. Very seemly, considering this album commemorates the 20th anniversary of the **Hubble Telescope**. There's plenty of fantastic licks here, some masterful lead playing, and keyboard swells accenting at just the right moments. The chordal structure itself is another testament to the abilities of **Lams**, **Richards**, and **Moriya**. Just when the listener thinks they know where it's going next, the trio throws another curveball.

Only "Cathedral Peak" and "Portland Rain" feature any real percussion on the album ("Hazardous Z" does feature shakers, but very briefly). That presents no issues here though; the acoustic/fingerstyle purists will find plenty to like considering that the trio fills in the void left by the lack of other instruments by rhythmically strumming and filling in each other's space in a very well-thought out manner. What they may dislike, though, is the overuse of effects and electric guitars.

The power of the group is on full display when it's just the three of them, especially on the improvisational pieces, which are just a tad too short. Here the group excels and the songs are just so well-done, that maybe they should've let the record button go and did it all improv. The trio wander without being too noodly and are able to complement each other brilliantly. There may be a lot of effects here, but it's really not so much a bother for those that aren't the purists (as mentioned in the previous paragraph). "Improv 1" definitely ends up a little on the cheesy side, falling somewhere between "new-age music for infomercial" and "stripped down Spaghetti-western ending credits roll."

The hands-down standout of this album is "Portland Rain," which has a foot firmly planed in the **John Fahey/Leo Kottke camp**. There's so much light and airy movement in this, that it just glides in your ears. The strings come in over-top and the piece changes dynamically. Continually shifts in direction cause the listener to stand up and take notice. Hi-hats appear out of the distance, and before you know it, a whole ensemble has emerged from where there were only three. Once again, contemplating where the song going is an exercise in futility unless you were a prodigal student of Fripp as these guys were with all of these chromatic shifts in typical chord structures. "Portland Rain" is a very interesting and powerful piece indeed.

There's a heavy **Steve Reich** connection on pieces like "Improv 8: Layered Circulation," and "Andromeda," which at times sounds similar to Reich's "Electric Counterpoint." There's a country western feel to the well-suited title of "Middle of TX," lending itself to slide guitar and even some whammy pedal action. Another great standout is the middle-eastern influenced "Hazardous Z," which will remind fingerstyle fans of players like **Andreas Kapsalis** and **Goran Ivanovic**. You won't find **Andreas** or **Kaki King's** percussive rhythms played on the body of the guitar here though; the trio relies heavily on their compositional muscles to carry the piece instead of high-flying guitar acrobatics. This can be a detriment if you're looking for someone similar to the aforementioned guitar heroes **Kapsalis** and **King**, but there's plenty of goodness to be found here.

Take for example the pentatonic-sounding "Chacarea," which features malleted percussion that sounds like either a xylophone or vibraphone. It's just one of those "ooh" moments that you'll get while listening to *Andromeda* that will leap out at you. There's so much going on that it's easy to get lost in all of the playing and forget about all the great background bits.

The only real downfall on this record is that some of the pieces can start feeling the same; not in overall feel, but in a lot of the interplay that happens between the three highly skilled musicians. Long-time fans may also wonder why there were no covers here, but it's a benefit, not a bummer. Musicians can be *Youtube* wonders by doing an interesting version of a well-known (or unknown) song, but in order to be taken seriously in this business, you have to rely on more than just a gimmick, even if it's a really good one. **California Guitar Trio** does a great job here, although they have the talent to stand out even more from the pack on previous releases.

Congratulations on nearly 20 years in the biz, fellas. Let's hope you continue to age like a fine wine.



Tracks

1. Cathedral Peak
2. Turn of the Tide
3. Andromeda
4. Improv IX
5. Hazardous Z
6. Chacarera
7. Improv VII
8. Middle of TX
9. Improv VIII – Layered Circulation
10. Portland Rain
11. Improv I

California Guitar Trio recycles Classical Gas with Frippery

Siuslaw News, Florence, Oregon
March 24, 2010 :: Reviewed by Burney Garelick"

A local physician shook his head. I never thought I'd see it here. Pink Floyd. And Beethoven hand in hand. And it was all great! Women bubbled with glee. They did "Bohemian Rhapsody". Did Helen Mirren get as much adulation as Queen? Did Elizabeth II? A retired attorney and fledgling guitarist whose mind is always in gear claimed he was totally engaged in the music with no passing thought to politics or economics. A long line formed at the table in the lobby where the CGT burned and autographed CDs of the just-played concert. (A brilliant marketing plan!) Clearly, the crowd was blown away by the California Guitar Trio, March 12 at the Florence Events Center, the sixth concert in the Seacoast Entertainment Association's 2009-10 season series. And the guitar workshop hours before the concert attracted a circle of 30 players anxious to learn some new licks from the masters. The CGT enjoys giving workshops at its gigs.

The trio makes long cross-country tours this time out included California, Oregon, Washington, Canada, Michigan, Illinois, Tennessee, Kentucky, before returning to their separate residences not in California. CGT members were not born and bred in the Golden State; they became an official ensemble there when they relocated to Los Angeles nearly 20 years ago when one of them married. They no longer live there; Hideyo Moriya lives in his native Japan; Paul Richards lives in his native Utah; and Bert Lams, a native of Belgium, lives on the East Coast. The guitarists communicate over the internet, exchanging tunes and arrangements,, and meet a few days before each concert tour. Yet they are able to pass the notes with precision, agility, and camaraderie. Music is a universal language, and California retains its golden marketing image. Guitar was their first and only instrument, according to amiable spokesman Paul, and they all began to play at age 13. But they did not meet until the 1980s in England at Robert Fripp guitar seminar. Zing went the strings! Fripp, an eccentric British guitarist who is left-handed but plays right-handed developed Guitar Craft, a series of zenlike guitar and personal development classes. One technique was New Standard Tuning, said to expand the range of the instrument. Fripp intended it for beginners, and it proved to be a hurdle for guitarists for whom standard tuning was second nature. Another technique CGT refined is Circulation in which each guitarist plays every third note allowing the note to be held three times longer than if played by a single guitarist. Bach might have flipped to hear his Toccata played with such dazzling sonority! Curiously, a year ago Fripp recommended Guitar Craft cease on its 25th anniversary in 2010. Nevertheless, the CGT mastered the course to enjoy a stellar career. Paul, Hideyo, and Bert all write music, and their program included instrumental covers and originals. There were no vocals; the guitars spoke volumes.

Originals included a lush, lilting innocent "Eve" prior to the apple event; a frenetic "Melrose Avenue" documenting their time in L.A.; a bucolic "Marsha" burbling in Fripp's English country garden; a towering "Cathedral Peak"; a Latin tune inadvertently inspired by folk tunes in Argentina; and "The Hazardous Sea" circulating swells from throughout the world. Covers included Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody"; an outrageous Pink Floyd rocker stretching the limits of acoustic guitar; Mason William's iconic "Classical Gas"; surf guitar from The Venture's "Pipeline"; "Sleepwalk" from rock an' rollers Santo and Johnny; Bach's Toccata and Fugue, Beethoven's "Presto Agitato"; and an even older composition for koto, a traditional Japanese stringed instrument. Eclectic pyrotechnics. Bert lit the fuse and snaked it through the three-dimensional grid of strings while Paul pumped an anchor pulled by Hideyo rolling bass notes back to Bert who tickled the strings into submission released and reiterated by Paul and contemplated by Hideyo and so on, round and round, a circle of sparkling lights, until Bert pulled the plug on the sudoku of strings marinated by the roaring applause of the crowd.

Playing Breedlove guitars from Bend, the CGT rocket scientists were full of sound and fury. They flew us to the moon, circulated through the stars from Jupiter to Mars, plunged into cosmic deep space shattering all records for velocity, and galloped to back earth like lone rangers to the "William Tell Overture" returning us, shook up but safe enough for the trek to the lobby to purchase a concert CD fresh off the burner. Deja vu all over again. Now that's circulation!

ACOUSTIC GUITAR

playlist



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California Guitar Trio

Echoes

Echoes, the latest from California Guitar Trio (Paul Richards, Bert Lams, and Hideyo Moriya), is a cleanly executed album featuring nine arrangements of classical and pop favorites. The most outstanding include Takeshi Terauchi and Moriya's "Unmei," a dazzlingly original, all-guitar surf/ska track derived from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and set on high flame with the plangent sustain of a single bass-note chord on electric guitar at the close. Simon Jeffes's "Music for a Found Harmonium" also delights as the familiar, propulsive theme music from the film *Napoleon Dynamite*. One inherent risk of performing covers is that they can make you itch to run home and pull out the originals—in this case, Mike Oldfield's "Tubular Bells" and Pink Floyd's "Echoes." If the trio attempted to perform its too-clever and indecisive version of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Freebird" at any self-respecting redneck bar, it would surely have to do so from behind a tall scrim of chicken wire. As a whole, though, the inherent virtuosity of the California Guitar Trio is evident in its ability to create seamless voicings—accomplished spectacularly on Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody." (Inner Knot, myspace.com/innerknot)



—JULIA CROWE

Three Of a Kind

An interview with Paul Richards of the California Guitar Trio

The music of acoustic virtuosos, the California Guitar Trio isn't easily pigeon-holed. Who else could play Bach's 'Toccat' and The Doors' 'Riders On The Storm' in the same set? The California Guitar Trio have built a reputation as one of the world's most innovative group of acoustic guitarists. They learned their craft well from King Crimson guitarist Robert Fripp and later starred in his 20-piece acoustic guitar orchestra, The League Of Crafty Guitarists.

Put classically trained Bert Lams, surf-rock enthusiast Hideyo Moriya and Led-Zeppelin loving rock and jazz player Paul Richards together in the same room and you can expect fireworks. Paul loves to experiment with acoustic guitar, whether he is playing his Somogyi custom acoustic with an unusual new standard tuning or using an E-bow on an acoustic to electrifying effect. The trio's latest instrumental acoustic album, *Whitewater*, is a rich and varied musical landscape, produced by renowned session bassist Tony Levin. Famed for his work with King Crimson, Peter Gabriel and Pink Floyd, Tony is also joining them on tour.

Acoustic caught up with Paul Richards during CGT's current tour in the States. We asked him about the secret of playing acoustic in all-guitar groups, rumours of a new album with Yes frontman Jon Anderson, and how CGT's albums even got played in outer space on board the NASA space shuttle Endeavor.

You're currently on tour in the States. What sort of set-up do you use to get a good acoustic sound to the audience?

At the moment, the three of us are playing Martin 000-16 series guitars customised for us with a slighter thinner body and a custom pickup. It's a fusion between a magnetic pickup from LR Baggs and an under-the-saddle transducer from B-band.

We use D'Addario strings and each of us are currently using Roland effects devices to give us that variety of sound that you hear on the *Whitewater* album. It's very electric-sounding at

times, but everything on there is done using the Martin acoustic guitars by running them through a Roland GT6 pedal board or Hideyo's VG8.

We also use an Eventide harmoniser for reverb. We don't tour with our own amplifiers as most of the time we'll go from our own rack into the house PA system. Every night there's a different set-up. Having a mixer on stage allows us to mix it ourselves and hear on the monitor what the sound is like going out into the house. As an acoustic player, that's important because in order to have the dynamics and the interplay between the three of us, we need to have the levels and the balances between things set in a way we can work with.

How do you interact with each other on stage to really keep the audience involved?

A lot of that has to do with the way the music is arranged and the way that we play together on stage. It depends on the piece of music on how that works. For instance, with the classical pieces, often the melodies will switch between the players and the focus goes from one player to another player to another. That can be in a fairly rapid succession or over a series of bars. I think the audience can sense who happens to be playing at that moment even by the way we're looking. In a way, it becomes a kind of subtle dance where instead of using our whole bodies, it's more focused on our fingers and our eyes. Instead of doing the big rock concert gesturing, it becomes a subtler interaction that I think people who appreciate acoustic or classical music can readily pick up on.

Are the audiences reacting well to the material from the new album, *Whitewater*?

Oh, very much so. Yes, we've had some really wonderful reviews and response to it. In fact, during the performance that we did on Friday night, where we played Bach's 'Toccat' and Fugue', I had this sense of very deep connection and understanding from the audience. It's pretty rare and one of those things that

you wish could be there all the time. We're very fortunate that it happens at all, in fact.

I think it comes from people being able to make a connection with the music and the performers and this connection helps the music to flow even greater and deeper. I know that it helps me to play better when I have this sense of connection.

So just from the beginning it was already a great performance. Then we invited Tony Levin on stage about midway through and I felt the energy kick up a notch from there. Even if the show had ended there, everybody would have been very excited and very happy, but then Jon Anderson walked out and sang and it seemed to take the whole thing through the roof.

Another show that I particularly remember was during a tour opening for King Crimson. We did a world tour with them in 1995 and 1996 and did over 130 concerts with them worldwide. One performance that stands out was in America in Cincinnati. The thing that was memorable for me, again, had to do with the connection between the music and the audience. When we finished the performance there was such a feeling of power and energy from the music that when the three of us went off stage, I still have a very vivid memory of my hands actually tingling with a sensation as if they were almost on fire. It was a very strong tingling sensation from the surge of energy that was produced from the music and the connection with the audience.

I noticed that you even use an E-bow with your acoustic on instrumental tracks like 'Punta Patri'...

Robert Fripp lent me my first E-bow during a project with him so I started exploring with it and found that it works very well with acoustic guitar and helps provide a different tonal atmosphere. Acoustic guitar has a fairly short sustain - you pluck the note and it dies away pretty quickly. So since we're playing acoustic guitars exclusively, it's always been interesting for me to find different ways to use the instrument.



Photo: Ingrid Pape

On the new album, there's a piece called 'Relative Illusion' that features quite a bit of the E-bow use on it. I think it helps give varied tones, plus I enjoy having the ability to have these infinite sustained notes. There's something about that that's kinda empowering.

What was it like having Tony Levin as the band's producer on *Whitewater*?

Tony has played on some of the greatest albums that have been made. When we were looking for a producer, originally we were thinking maybe we should hire one of these big-time expensive producers, but the budget wouldn't allow for that. So what ended up being maybe even *better* than that was having Tony, who has worked with some of the greatest producers in the world and on some really amazing albums. His experience working on a variety of projects really helped make the album flow well and helped us by having his ears when we were there playing in the studio.

We recorded the entire album in basically three and a half days. It actually went very smoothly and that was largely in part to having Tony there helping us. He really is an amazing musician and in the role of producer I felt he was able to use his breadth of experience and knowledge and apply it to our work in the studio to produce

what I feel is our best CD yet.

In fact, we meet up with Tony on Wednesday and we'll be doing eight or nine concerts on the East Coast with Tony and Pat Mastelotto from King Crimson on drums.

I understand the CGT all live miles apart in different states or even countries. Does that make rehearsing together a problem and if so, how do you get around that?

(laughs) Yeah, that's always been an issue, except in the very beginning when the three of us were based in Los Angeles. For our first four years together as a trio, we lived at Bert's place and spent a lot of time practising and working together, but since then Hideyo is currently living in Japan and I'm in Utah.

We're on tour almost half the year now, so our schedule is something like one month on, one month off. At the beginning of each tour we'll always set aside some time where we can practise and work on new music and then during the tours we'll often work on ideas together at soundcheck if we have time. So for each tour we always try to come up with something new we want to work on.

In fact, on this particular tour, Jon Anderson, the singer from Yes, contacted us. So we met up in San Diego and started work on some music of his that may develop into a full guitar

concerto. At this point, we've already done two full days of work on the first movement, working on some basic parts for it.

We actually met up with Jon at a performance at the NAMM convention in the Los Angeles area. The California Guitar Trio gave a performance for the acoustic instrument manufacturers in a large ballroom with close to a thousand people there. We began playing the concert and invited Tony Levin from Peter Gabriel's group to come and join us halfway through and then at the end of the set we had asked Jon if he would come and sing with us. But he actually had another engagement that night and we didn't know if he was gonna make it to play with us at that concert. So we began playing a piece of music from Yes called 'Heart Of The Sunrise' without knowing if he was actually in the building or not. When it came to the part where the singing begins he walked out from the side of the stage and surprised all of us. The audience went completely wild, many of the people knowing who he was.

After we played 'Heart Of The Sunrise' we played some of the new guitar concerto that we're working on with him and it was a really amazing experience.

What sort of style of concerto is it?

You know, I think it sounds very much like Jon Anderson wrote the

music but it does have some Spanish-style influences. If it does eventually become a full-blown concerto I think it will be quite interesting to hear. It's really in its bare essence, maybe it's more like a sonata at this point but it has some of those wonderful melodies that Jon is known for.

I understand the three of you met originally on one of Robert Fripp's Guitar Craft courses.

Yes, I heard about the Guitar Craft courses through a guitar teacher that I was studying with at the time. I think he read about them in a magazine and he was a big fan of Robert Fripp and was very excited about it. He went on one of the very first courses and after he came back, he suggested I really needed to go on one of these courses. I had previously studied music at the University of Utah and had private teachers but when I went initially, I think that for me that it was just a unique opportunity to study guitars and music in a very concise way that I hadn't found anywhere else.

The trio members come from such diverse backgrounds. What was it that brought you together?

You know, people ask us how the three of us ended up working so well together. It's kinda hard to say, actually, because there were so many guitar players and students studying with Robert Fripp in Guitar Craft that it's an amazing thing that the three of us ended up getting along. I think we got along as friends initially, but there was also a common interest in different kinds of music that was one of the things that drew us together.

Instead of pulling us in different directions we allow it to feed and influence what we do, so we use it to our advantage. So we might have one piece of music where you can hear each of those different influences coming out, and for us, that's a good thing. We like music that's very widely influenced and has lots of different styles. That's always been something that we enjoy.

After the course, the three of you ended up playing in Fripp's 20-piece guitar orchestra, The League Of Crafty Guitarists. How did he coordinate that and get everybody working as a team?

That was the key to the whole experience. I would say that the majority of our work on the Guitar Craft course was learning to play together as a group. There were various exercises and pieces of music, which were specifically designed to help us play

together better as a group and listen to each other. For instance, there's this technique that we call *circulation*.

We sat in a large circle, usually Robert would be at the head of the circle, and he would play a note and the person to his right would in turn play a note and these notes would successively pass around the circle. There could be various tempos, speeding up or slowing down, but the trick is to be able to play your one note at the right time. You have to really listen to the other people. You cannot do it without being focused on the group as a whole.

As a trio, the key is for us to be able to play our own part well, but also to be able to hear clearly what the other two guys are doing, so I don't get lost or caught up in my own playing too much. I think that's really a struggle that a lot of groups have where players become quite self-absorbed by focusing more on their own playing and not being so sensitive to what's happening in the group as a whole. People who really have a technical virtuosity can sometimes lean towards becoming more self-expressive in a way where it becomes more about their own playing than the music of the group.

Do you still use those custom Somogyi guitars with the new standard tuning?

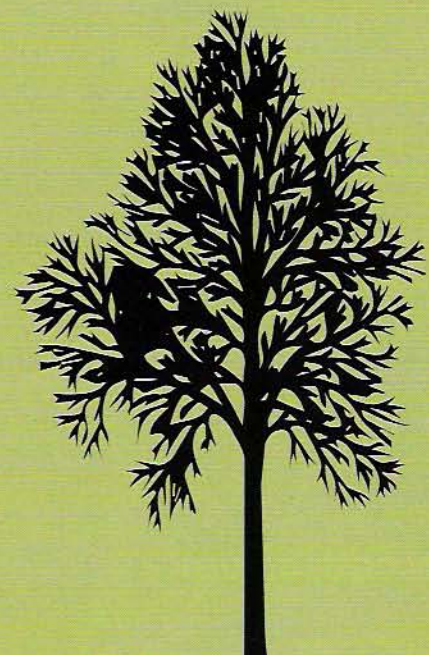
Yes, I have my Somogyi guitar and I still use it occasionally on the tours. It's a very unique instrument and I still enjoy playing it. The new standard tuning comes from the Guitar Craft course. It has become a standard for those courses. The tuning is actually a fifth tuning as opposed to the traditional guitar tuning in fourths.

So the open strings of the tuning are C, G, D, A, E, and G. The four bottom lowest strings are the same as on a cello and the middle four are the same as on a viola. There's a G on the top that keeps it within the C major pentatonic scale so you have a bass of C major like the white keys on the piano. You also have this element of the traditional classical tuning of the cello or viola under the fifths.

So a number of things happen - you have a very expanded range on the guitar, which works well for playing within a guitar ensemble or a guitar trio. For somebody who's played in regular standard tuning all their life, it also gives an opportunity to start over again and play things in a new and a different way. We use it exclusively now so everything we're playing now is using that tuning. I've been using that tuning for more than 15 years now.



“Acoustic guitar has a fairly short sustain - you pluck the note and it dies away pretty quickly. So since we're playing acoustic guitars exclusively, it's always been interesting for me to find different ways to use the instrument.”



I looked at a Novax fretboard using new standard tuning and the frets seem to be slanted as you go down the neck of the guitar, how easy is that to play?

It's a bit *stretchier* playing down in the bass range, so it does take a bit of adjustment. When you're playing octaves or widespread intervals down in the lower range it does require a bit more stretching. But the fingers are very adaptable and it usually only takes me a few days of practising to go back and forth from one of the other guitars. I will usually choose a guitar for a tour and stick with that guitar throughout the tour. I'm not one of those guitar players that has 10 guitars on stage!

I personally prefer to create a very intimate relationship with one instrument at a time and focus on that relationship and through a tour, become more intimate with the instrument over time.

What's your earliest acoustic guitar memory?

My first acoustic guitar was a cheap model called an Applause. I don't think they exist any more but I remember a friend playing the opening bars of 'Stairway To Heaven' on his acoustic guitar. Somehow at the age of 13, seeing that played on an acoustic guitar was a significant moment that made me excited and want to play acoustic guitar.

As soon as I got one I was able to pick it up fairly quickly. I played a lot!

At that age, instead of running out and playing and doing normal things, I spent a lot of time in my bedroom with my guitar practising. Within a year or two, I remember that the first significant solo piece that I learnt was a Steve Howe piece, 'Mood For A Day'. I was quite proud of that because I sat down and figured it out by ear all by myself. I think I was only 14 or 15 at that time, but you know it's a fairly complex piece in almost a baroque style with a little bit of Spanish style influence. I would say that learning that piece was one of the biggest acoustic guitar moments in my early days.

I listened to a lot of Steve Howe and Yes at an early age, and Jimmy Page from Led Zeppelin. I used to sit down and learn all of the electric and acoustic Led Zeppelin pieces and I could pretty much play through the first four Led Zeppelin records. I used to try to play through them note for note along with the records.

Some of the trio's songs were even played in outer space on board the NASA space shuttle Endeavor. How did that come about?

When we were on tour with King Crimson, some people that had seen us play with Crimson worked for NASA. We became friends with them and one of them was working with the astronauts on Endeavor. Every morning when the Houston control centre wakes the astronauts, they played some tracks from the California Guitar

Trio to wake up the crew members with. They had a recording that they let us hear of the guys responding and they seemed to enjoy it, so that was good.

What are the California Guitar Trio's plans for the future?

We have a number of projects that we're kind of excited about. One of the things that we want to do is an all-classical CD. Up to this point, most of our CDs have been something of a combination of music and they generally reflect our diverse taste in music but we're looking more at focusing on the individual aspects of what we do. One of these things will likely be a classical CD.

We've also talked about doing a CD that features much more of the improvisational side of the California Guitar Trio. So we have these big projects we would like to work on and it will just be a matter of time before we see which one gets the most attention from us and released first. We're also hoping to come back and play in the UK - we've done several performances there. Hopefully won't be too long before we're back again!

● Petra Jones

Photo: Jake Clennell

