

ACOUSTIC GUITAR

Sideman's Solo

Good things can happen when you live in Nashville and play guitar as well as Peter Huttlinger. A former member of John Denver's band, Huttlinger has spent the past few years creating crisp acoustic sounds onstage for artists such as LeAnn Rimes and Shedaisy. He's also in demand at recording sessions where his versatility on the flattop shines behind such promising new voices as Jo Dee Messina and folk-pop stylist Mae Robertson. Huttlinger's light is too bright to keep under a bushel, though, and his recent solo CD, *Naked Pop* (Favored Nations Acoustic,

www.favorednationsacoustic.com), puts the crafty guitarist out front, performing instrumentals that turn back the pages of *Billboard's* Top 40.

Huttlinger tackles such radio blockbuster as Steely Dan's "Josie," Stevie Wonder's "Sir Duke," and the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby," incorporating as much of the musical architecture and energy of the original recordings as possible. "I wanted to be true to the melody and to the changes on these tunes, so I didn't do a lot of arranging and reharmonizing," Huttlinger says. "I was looking for tunes that had a great melody and a great bass line, like the Jackson Five's 'I Want You'—the bass line on that is just groovin'. On this record, it was all about how I could be true to the original and do it all on one guitar in one pass."

For the CD's last three selections

What They Play

On *Naked Pop* Peter Huttlinger played a Collings OM-1C and a classical guitar built by Paul McGill (www.mcgillguitars.com). Other guitars that Huttlinger brings to the studio include a Collings OM-2HC and a 1952 Gibson J-45. Onstage, Huttlinger uses the OM-1C, outfitted with L.R. Baggs iBeam and Fishman Matrix pickups, which he runs through a Baggs Para Acoustic DI and into a rack containing a Rocktron Rack Interface and a Lexicon MPX1 digital reverb. He uses Elixir strings exclusively, creating his own sets with gauges of .013, .017, .026, .032, .042, and .056. For flatpicking, Huttlinger likes the D'Andrea Pro Plec (1.5 mm. And 2.03.), and for fingerpicking, he uses John Pearse thumbpicks.

("Fields of Gold," "Monaghan Jig," and "Josie"), Huttlinger adds string quintet arrangements by Don Hart to his solo guitar. Musical diversity is one of the things he thrives on as a guitarist. "In a solo gig, I've got to hold people's attention for a couple of hours, and I've got to hold my own, too" he says. "Partly it's a selfish thing—in a situation like that, I get bored if I play the same style of music for more than three or four tunes in a row. I've said what I need to say, so I move on. Maybe it means I'm a shallow player and don't have much to say in any one style. But overall it's because I'm interested in a lot of different kinds of music."

Huttlinger has been making instrumental records since 1995, both on his own Instar Records label and on Maple Street

(www.maplestreetmusic.com). He has also written and recorded music for television, and has produced the two-volume, note-for-note instructional video *Learn to Play the Songs of John Denver* (Homespun, www.homespuntapes.com). He hopes to release his own vide of *Naked Pop* arrangements this year.

Huttlinger's reputation as a world-class fingerpicker was aced in 2000, when he won the National Fingerpicking Championship at Winfield, Kansas, by playing, among other tunes, a samba-style arrangement of Harold Arlen's "Over the Rainbow" (which Huttlinger also recorded for *Naked Pop*).

However, he's equally dangerous with a flatpick, maintaining a large

repertoire in different styles through intensive practice. "My goal is fives hours a day," Huttlinger says. "I practice enough to keep what I call my 'lousy level' up, so that when I'm playing my worst, it's still pretty good. It takes a lot of work because the acoustic guitar is such a physical instrument."

With his solo career on the rise and a wealth of sideman opportunities on the table, Huttlinger emphasizes the importance of being where the action is. "If you're in a town where things aren't happening musically, if it's not a music business kind of town, you've got to go somewhere where it's happening," he says. "Otherwise you've diminished your chances greatly. To get noticed, it takes a lot of luck. Dedication, determination, all that stuff is important, too. But there's a lot of luck involved."

—Jim Ohlschmidt



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