

Superheroes of Wood, Steel, and Nylon

50 TRANSCENDENT ACOUSTIC GUITARISTS

By the Guitar Player Staff

BY NATURE OF THE FACT THAT ACOUSTIC guitars predated electrics by a few centuries, the list of highly influential guitar-wielding instrumentalists and singer-songwriters is huge by comparison. In that light, trying to whittle this story down to just 50 “transcendent” acoustic players was a challenge for all of us. We haggled endlessly over the 50 candidates and ultimately did our best to present a wide swath of guitar pioneers, stylists, and innovators who have, each in their own way, pushed the envelope of guitar music for the benefit of humankind. Of course, there are many more in the genres of blues, country, classical, folk, jazz, pop, rock, and new age whose contributions to the lexicon of modern guitar music would earn them a place on any list of Top Acoustic Players. Nevertheless, we trust the guitarists we’ve presented here will inspire you to check them out via all the usual media channels, and, hopefully, learn something from what they bring. We certainly did! —ART THOMPSON

COVER STORY

SUPERHEROES OF WOOD, STEEL, AND NYLON



Martin Carthy

Considered the father of the English folk revival of the '60s, Carthy, with his formidable talents as a guitarist/multi-instrumentalist, singer, and deep scholar of traditional folk music, influenced Bob Dylan and Paul Simon, and helped give rise to such English folk-rock groups as the Albion Band, Fairport Convention, and Steel-eye Span. —AT



Charo

With an over-the-top charisma that was made for televisions and concert halls, it might have been easy to dismiss Charo's astounding skills as a guitarist. Happily, *GP* readers didn't go there, and they twice voted her Best Classical Flamenco Guitarist in the World. —AT/MM



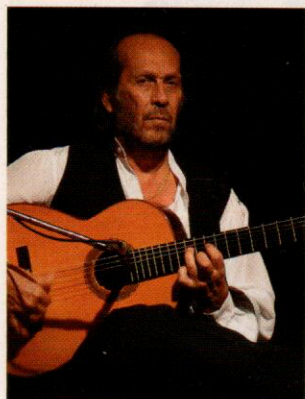
Elizabeth (Libba) Cotten

Not "discovered" until she was in her 60s—and by the Seeger family no less—Cotten strung her guitar upside down, played alternating bass lines with her fingers and melodies with her thumb, and invented the fingerpicking technique known as "Cotten Picking." —MM



Peppino D'Agostino

D'Agostino's style involves open tunings and percussive effects, which come to the fore in his melodic and technically challenging compositions. An engaging solo performer, he is also an active member of the Pacific Guitar Ensemble and has collaborated and recorded with classical guitarist David Tanenbaum, drummer Jeff Campitelli, and the legendary harpist/violinist Carlos Reyes. —AT



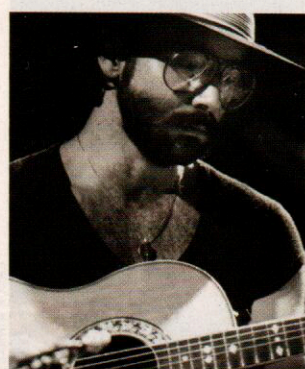
Paco de Lucia

A virtuosic flamenco guitarist, de Lucia brought the Spanish guitar style into the modern age, adding jazz harmonies and scales to the traditional stylistic strumming. His late-'70s collaborations with John McLaughlin, Al Di Meola and Larry Coryell in duo and trio formats remain some of the greatest guitar records ever. —MR



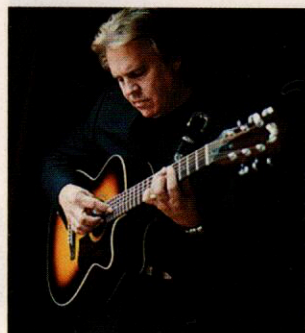
Ani DiFranco

DiFranco's popularity (she's a multiple Grammy winner/nominee), social-consciousness-raising songwriting, and thrilling percussive style not only inspired a wave of singer/songwriters, but also prompted new players to explore the many open and alternate tunings she deploys. *GP* has certainly covered many of her tunings—which DiFranco is always happy to share. —JL/MM



Al Di Meola

After gaining acclaim as the stunningly fast electric guitarist for '70s fusion pioneers Return to Forever, Al Di Meola again won over legions of guitar fans with *Friday Night in San Francisco*—the 1981 acoustic album also featuring John McLaughlin and Paco De Lucia. The record would cement Di Meola's status as perhaps the most influential acoustic alternate picker ever. —JG



Doyle Dykes

An amazingly accomplished player, Dykes was heavily influenced by Chet Atkins, but seemingly also by everything else he heard growing up. Whether on nylon- or steel-string guitars, his magnificent chops, sweet tone, inventive arrangements, and the way he puts it together so soulfully, make him a gold standard among the world's top fingerstylists. —AT