



## Artist Interview: André Bush

by [Stephen Rekas](#)

**Guitar Sessions:** Who or what events inspired you to play the guitar? Was music a part of your household when growing up?

**André Bush:** My uncle was an avocational guitarist and played Beatles tunes in small rock groups. As an eight year old, it was awesome to see these guys I looked up to rocking out. I couldn't get enough and couldn't wait to jam with them.

**GS:** How old were you when you began to play seriously? Do you feel that your starting age is a critical factor in playing your style?

**AB:** I got serious about playing when I was 14. Like many teenagers, I had a lot of energy that had nowhere to go, so I threw it all into practice. I know great musicians who got serious about music either much older or younger than me, so that doesn't matter, but it's hard to get the momentum you need to reach a professional level of musicianship once you have other responsibilities - like a wife and kids. So it's good to devote countless hours to practice in your early teens, 'cause you'll never have that kind of time again.

**GS:** What is the extent of your formal music training?

**AB:** I attended Roosevelt School of the Arts in Fresno, California, and I have a Bachelor's degree in Jazz Performance from Cal Arts.

**GS:** What styles interested you when you first began to play? How do those preferences influence your current music?

**AB:** Two of the guitarists that first caught my ear and inspired all that practicing were Eddie Van Halen and Jeff Beck. Especially the first three Van Halen albums and Beck's *Blow by Blow*. Eddie's playing in those days was simply transcendental. The cool thing is- I love their playing and those records to this day. I also really liked Angus Young from AC/DC. As I got into my mid to late teens and my ears matured a bit, I discovered jazz. I was hooked! I totally fell in love with Pat Metheny's playing and writing. For me he was the first artist that I heard that truly combined the energy and accessibility of rock with the cerebral qualities of jazz. His music had it all and still does. From Pat, I discovered Scofield, John McLaughlin, Pat Martino, mid to late sixties Miles, etc. I was ruined for life! From that point I went into a period of really playing straight ahead jazz and I played a Gibson ES175. I was into Wes Montgomery, Jim Hall, Kenny Burrell, Joe Pass and really early players such as Charlie Christian, Django and all the way back to Eddie Lang! As to how those players influence my current work, the jazz guys are obvious, but I finally feel in the last few years that I've been able to integrate the influence of those rock players, as well as the modern and traditional

jazz players into an organic whole. I feel that you must be a complete sum of all your influences in order to say something in music that's honest.

**GS:** Who were your teachers and which method books did you use?

**AB:** My first teacher was George Collichio, who's still quite active in Rochester, New York. Mike Dana was my guitar teacher in high school, and I've studied with a handful of the greatest modern jazz players in the world including Joe Diorio, John Stowell, Larry Koonse, Peter Sprague and Tom Hynes. The lessons in life, career development, and music these guys gave me resonate to this day. Like almost everybody, I went through the complete *Mel Bay Modern Guitar Method* books. What a great resource! Some of the books that I got into later which I can recommend include Mick Goodrick's *The Advancing Guitarist*, Joe Diorio's *Fusion* and *21st Century Intervallic Designs*, and the David Baker jazz improvisation books.

**GS:** Is there anyone you would like to collaborate with in a recording or tour?

**AB:** I play with a lot of great artists whose music and creativity I enjoy - like Art Lande, who plays piano on my latest CD, *Start from Silence*, and saxophonist Dave Liebman and drummer Steve Smith, who both recorded on my CD, *Invisible City*. But there are tons of great musicians in jazz, rock and pop and I'm always on the lookout for new collaborations. I like Jonatha Brooke's singing and songwriting, so she'd probably be fun to work with.



[Start from Silence](#)  
[Hear a sample track](#)

**GS:** What musical avenues do you wish to explore in the future?

**AB:** I just want to keep getting better at developing my thing. I think that's the ultimate goal.

**GS:** Which of your albums would you recommend to someone buying one of your recordings for the first time?

**AB:** My new CD, *Start from Silence*, which features all original compositions of mine with Art Lande, Bruce Williamson, Peter Barshay and Alan Hall. The concept of the album was to compose the music in my studio, fully aware, following the direction the music dictated, with silence as the starting point and working outward. No clichés, no easy answers. These are the hallmarks of my favorite musicians. In creating this album, I sought to balance the various aspects of music I love most - dense and open harmonic settings; rhythmic/metric flexibility; lyricism and melodic abstraction; primal, visceral expression and controlled, logically developed gestures.

I think the album contains some of my best work, and it's been getting great reviews from critics and fans throughout the country. It's available at retail outlets, downloading websites and, of course, [www.andrebush.com](http://www.andrebush.com)

**GS:** Career high/low?

**AB:** I try not to focus too much on the lows, 'cause this business is hard on everyone with no exceptions. One big high point was my group opening for Mike Stern's group a couple of years ago at Slim's in San Francisco. Mike was such a hero for me when I was growing up. The gig was great, and the next day Mike and I got together and jammed all day. What a great memory!

**GS:** How has your family affected your music?

**AB:** Family is very important to me. In my formative years, it was great to have parents who both supported my music, and were doing it for a living. Now, I have a wonderful wife, a beautiful three year-old daughter, a cool dog, and a home life that are central to my creativity. I'm very lucky. I also have great friends. You learn to value things like that as you mature.

**GS:** What's your current tour schedule like?

**AB:** I just got off a major U.S. tour a few months ago with a hugely popular Philippine entertainer, playing 10,000 to 15,000-seat stadiums. What a great gig! I've held off extensive road tours for the past few months while performing locally with my own group, teaching extensively, and developing a bunch of new, exciting music products. I have a ton of projects in the works that'll show up in 2006.

**GS:** Apart from music, what are your interests?

**AB:** I love to read. I am starting to get into Yoga at a deeper level and that's been an interest of mine for awhile. I'm a baseball nut, and a die-hard SF Giants fan.....Go Giants!

**GS:** Do you teach or act as a musical mentor?

**AB:** Yes - I've recently joined the faculty at Fresno City College, and I've been teaching at the Jazzschool (in Berkeley, CA), the Stanford Jazz Workshop, and Jazz Camp West. I love to teach. I have a handful of fairly advanced jazz students whom I love working with. At their level, some of the lessons wind up being mostly philosophical which is important as it really helps me articulate my views on music and the guitar.

**GS:** Tell me about your new book for Mel Bay Publications.

**AB:** I wrote *Modern Jazz Guitar Styles*, a new book and CD available through [www.melbay.com](http://www.melbay.com) and on sale in Guitar Center stores nationwide. It includes chapters on soloing, chords, rhythm and effects and extensive exercises on modern scale applications and intervals, developing individual chord voicings, incorporating rock and funk concepts, exploring elements from world music like odd meters and polyrhythm, and ideas for developing your own sonic textures and approach to tonal manipulation. I wrote the book to provide serious students and professionals with a comprehensive overview of the current state of jazz guitar. It goes above and beyond what most other books cover.

Besides *Modern Jazz Guitar Styles*, I contribute frequently to *Guitar Player Magazine* and have written for *Guitar Sessions*. I'm also gathering ideas to produce an instructional DVD and write another book.

**GS:** Describe your practice routine if you would.

**AB:** Most of my practice time at this point revolves around writing music and learning music for projects I'm involved with. I do get into a new book every once in a while, though, and then I'll practice out of that. I usually practice about two hours a day and I play out a lot!

**GS:** Obviously, you read music. What's your opinion of tab vs. notation?

**AB:** I have to say that I'm not a huge fan of tab, simply because there is no "real world" professional application for it. For the projects I'm involved with, music literacy is a requirement.

**GS:** What do you do to keep your repertoire fresh-sounding?

**AB:** I just keep coming at the music with enthusiasm. That's very important. The great drummer Steve Smith has really been inspirational to me on that point. I've played with him quite a bit, and never seen him not give 100% to whatever he's doing, regardless of style. His attitude is contagious and he raises the level of whatever he's involved with. He always plays his butt off. On the other hand, there is nothing worse than burned-out, jaded, unenthusiastic musicians. These guys are a drag to be around or play with.

**GS:** What areas of the traditional repertoire you would like to explore?

**AB:** Classical guitar is so underrated by so many professional and student jazz guitarists, and that's a shame to have such a great repertoire excluded. I try to challenge myself to incorporate music like Bach, Villa-Lobos, and Fernando Sor into my music. Students this should look into these composers.

**GS:** Do you use any open or alternate tunings?

**AB:** Not really, although I've recently started tuning my acoustic guitar down a whole step and writing that way. I really like the resonance of the instrument tuned low like that.

**GS:** What are your preferred guitars, strings, picks, pickup, amps, or mics? Do you endorse any products? Is there anything on your wish list?

**AB:** Yes, I endorse Thomastik-Infeld guitar strings and recommend them to every player I know. Their strings create simply the cleanest, purest tone you can get for whatever sound you're going for. I switched to Thomastik-Infeld strings a while ago and never looked back, and I make sure all of my students use them. I'm also currently working with an unnamed guitar company to design my own signature model guitar. The design will facilitate playing my brand of music - a versatile semi-hollow guitar adept for jazz, rock, *Fusion* and more. It's a very exciting project and I hope I can share more information about it soon.

**GS:** What's your opinion of professional vs. self-management?

**AB:** I entered into a relationship with THEME productions for management this year, a company that is run by Jason Arnold. I can't say enough about him, his work ethic, and the number of projects he's initiated for us.

**GS:** What has your experience with record companies been like?

**AB:** Good. By now I've released CD's on small jazz labels and on my own, and I've learned there are certain benefits with each. I was impressed with the radio airplay that one of the small jazz labels was able to produce, and it's been great putting out *Start from Silence* on my own with help from a distribution company. I also recorded for Nnenna Freelon's new release on Concord Records, *Blueprint of a Lady*, and that was a great experience.

**GS:** Any tips on touring, performance etiquette or artist/venue manager relations?

**AB:** Be on time, dress well, act like a professional and represent the music in the way it deserves to be represented. For touring, get sleep when you can get it, and be careful what you eat. Exercise on the road!

**GS:** How did you enhance your harmonic palette?

**AB:** I've done a lot of hard work on fretboard harmony. I think the harmonic potential of the guitar is so great, once you break out of standard chord positions and learn to generate your own chord voicings. Check out the "Teaching" page on my website, [www.andrebush.com](http://www.andrebush.com) where you'll find downloadable lessons that outline my chord approach.

**GS:** What twists and turns has your career taken since our original 2001 interview?

**AB:** A lot has happened in the past four years! I have my new book out with Mel Bay entitled *Modern Jazz Guitar Styles*. My latest CD, *Start from Silence* is now available, and I recently recorded on Nnenna Freelon's new album *Blueprint of a Lady*. Besides that, in addition to my other teaching duties I've taken a faculty position at Fresno City College alongside Mike Dana, one of my first guitar teachers. It's been a blast! I'm also now an endorsing artist for Thomastik-Infeld guitar strings, which is great 'cause I'm such a huge fan of their strings.

**GS:** What motivated you to write your book, *Modern Jazz Guitar Styles*? How have sales of your book been going?

**AB:** *Modern Jazz Guitar Styles* is doing incredibly well. It has been getting outstanding reviews across the country from critics, educators, professional musicians, students and enthusiasts - everyone. It's on sale through the Mel Bay website and its distribution network and is also available in Guitar Center stores nationwide, so every guitarist has the opportunity to buy themselves a copy. As far as motivation to write the book, I wanted to really sum up and codify the developments in jazz guitar post-1965 or so, including the Joe

Beck, John McLaughlin, and Larry Coryell era. These guys really began to incorporate rock and world music into the traditional jazz guitar vernacular, extending the vocabulary.

**GS:** What new projects do you have on the horizon? Are you touring, teaching, recording or just staying at home with your family?

**AB:** I'm working on a ton of projects - new recording, teaching, and writing projects are all on the horizon. I'd love to produce an instructional DVD for guitar players, I'm thinking about concepts for another book, and I'm currently in negotiation with a new guitar company to design my own signature guitar - it's going to be incredible!

**GS:** What artists inspired you early on? Who are you listening to now?

**AB:** I continually sing the praises of Nguyen Le, a French Vietnamese guitarist who lives in Paris and is simply amazing, both as a player and composer. His latest album is called *Walking on the Tiger's Tail* and is available here in the States through ACT Music. I haven't had a chance to check out Pat Metheny's new one (*The Way Up*) but I hear great things about it. I really dig everything Kurt Rosenwinkel does, especially his last album, *Deep Song*.

**GS:** What special considerations do you make when accompanying a singer?

**AB:** This is almost another interview in itself! I teach clinics and lessons with vocalists for working in a duo context with guitar all the time. It's a great way to make music. From the guitarist's perspective, the responsibility is exponentially greater. That includes not only the obvious needs to outline form, melody, harmony, rhythm, and bass functions, but also less obvious things such as awareness of a vocalist's range and comfort zones. The dynamic range of one singer compared with another can be vastly different. In addition, the dynamic range of the ensemble itself is much smaller than with a drummer, so being aware of dynamics and the way you shape phrases throughout a song become really important.

Readers can email André Bush with questions on chord voicing, vocal accompaniment or any other guitar-related topic at [andrebush@aol.com](mailto:andrebush@aol.com).