

Huella Azul

Gary Lucas: world class guitarist

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Photo: Rafael Arriaga Zazueta

Gary Lucas is on the move in 2018. A world class guitar hero, a Grammy-nominated songwriter and composer, an international recording artist with over 30 acclaimed solo albums to date, and a soundtrack composer for film and televisión.

He has recorded over 30 acclaimed albums in a variety of genres: Jazz, Rock, Classical, Folk, Blues and World Music, and has performed in over 40 countries to date. He has received many honors and awards, including being invited to perform solo before the General Assembly of the UN on January 27th 2017 to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day. He was also recently profiled on National Public Radio (NPR).

Dubbed “The Thinking Man’s Guitar Hero” by *The New Yorker*, “The world’s most popular avant-rock guitarist” by *The Independent* (UK), “One of the 100 Greatest Living Guitarists” (Classic Rock), “Legendary Leftfield guitarist” by *The Guardian* (UK), “Guitarist of 1000 Ideas” by *The New York Times*, “a true axe God” by *Melody Maker*, and “One of the five best guitarists in the world” by the national Czech newspaper *Lidove Noviny*.

The British world music magazine fRoots recently described Gary Lucas as “without question, the most innovative and challenging guitarist playing today.” Rolling Stone’s David Fricke wrote: “Gary Lucas is one of the best and most original guitarists in America... a modern guitar miracle.” Best-selling author/producer Dan Levitin (“This Is Your Brain On Music”) recently cited Gary as “the greatest living electric guitarist”. Gary was also dubbed “one of the world’s greatest guitar players” by HITS Magazine. Pete Frame, music journalist, founder/editor of legendary UK music magazine ZigZag, and author/creator of 5 volumes of “Rock Family Trees” said of Gary, “Can there be another musician as adventurous, ingenious, accomplished, diverse, intrepid, hard-working and well-travelled as Gary Lucas?”

The interview

CB. How do you describe your “old” & your “new” sound?

Gary. I don’t think there is much of a difference. I think the sounds I was laying down and I daresay pioneering on my very first solo album “*Skeleton at the Feast*” are still unique and are still functioning today as part of my musical vocabulary, even though I use a lot less fx. Maybe I favor acoustic guitar more perhaps. I like to perform in that acoustic arena especially because there is no way to hide behind the fx or volume, you can’t fake it—you can either pull it off --or not.

CB. What does the Blues mean to you?

Gary. Everything. It’s the root foundation of my sound. The deepest and the holiest music on earth. It connects all the dots between African, Latino, Celtic, Arabic, Jewish, Chinese, musics and then some. The space between the white notes and the black notes on the piano. The sound of a human wailing in pain or ecstasy or both. That’s the Blues.

CB. Of all the guitarists you've met, who do you admire the most?

Gary. Peter Green. The ultimate Blues man. The greatest and most sensitive touch and tone on electric guitar ever. What he did with Blues as a player and a composer of songs remains beautiful, mysterious and unique to this day.

CB. What do you consider your best song and your best album?

Gary. “*Grace*”, my collaboration with Jeff Buckley is the one I am most proud of. I daresay neither Jeff or I could have written it by ourselves, which underscores the beauty of collaboration. As far as one I wrote 100% words and music, probably “*Fata Morgana*” from my “*Coming Clean*” album. My best album would probably be my album “*The Edge of Heaven*”, my 30’s Chinese pop tribute (which I’ve just recorded a follow-up to). Close second would be the last studio Gods and Monsters album “*The Ordeal of Civility*”.

CB. Which of the people you have worked with do you consider the best friend?

Gary. Feifei Yang without a doubt, the mainland Chinese vocalist and erhu virtuoso who is the current singer in my Chinese music project *The Edge Of Heaven Live*. She is the nicest and most kind and loyal person, and the least diva-isa of any singer I have ever worked with.

CB. Which is the best moment of your career and which is the worst?

Gary. Recording the demo of “*Grace*” with Jeff Buckley. That was without a doubt the most magic and transcendental moment, as described in my book “*Touched By Grace: My Time with Jeff Buckley*” (Jawbone). I just trusted him that he knew what to do with the instrumental music I wrote for him—and with his vocal and lyrics he knocked it out of the park!

Worst would be getting stiffed on my guarantee after a gig in Glasgow in 1990—I had a 10 hour drive back to London the next day and a gig in London that next night and I was in the worst mood imaginable that day—ugh.

CB. What are some of the most memorable gigs you've had?

Gary. Playing before the General Assembly of the UN on Holocaust Memorial Day last January.

Gary Lucas - Holocaust Memorial Ceremony

<https://vimeo.com/201390227>

Also playing at the legendary Apollo Theatre in Harlem last year at a Jimi Hendrix Tribute.

Lastly, performing my live score for the silent thriller "The Unholy Three" at the legendary Cinematheque Francaise in Paris two weeks ago, which was totally sold-out. <http://garylucas.com/www/unholy/unholy.shtml>

Gary Lucas plays "The Unholy Three"

<https://youtu.be/ySETDEdgui4>

CB. What is the best advice that was ever given to you?

Gary. Be your own hero.

CB. What advice would you give to the new guitarist generation?

Gary. Follow your own path and make it new. Learn how to speak eloquently on your instrument and try and find your own individual voice on it. Rules are meant to be broken! There are no fixed rules of guitar. There are so many technically adept guitarists out there who can play a million notes a minute but say nothing to me.

CB. What are your hopes and your fears about the future of music?

Gary. That it all is sounding so similar and bland and safe and homogenous now, there is very little of the rugged individualist spirit of a Captain Beefheart or a Tim and Jeff Buckley out there today. People are frightened, because they go into it for the supposed financial rewards instead of for the love of it. Love over gold, as Don Van Vliet (Captain Beefheart) used to say.

CB. What's been your experience of gigs in Mexico?

Gary. Just fantastic! People really listen closely and have excellent taste. I love the Mexican spirit—so soulful and fiery and spirited, it is just about my favorite place to play in the world.

CB. Would you give us a message for readers of Cultura Blues magazine?

Gary. Keep on keeping on doing what you do—and do it to death! Anything worth doing involves a lot of hard work and sacrifice and that especially is true in music. If you feel you have a gift for it, and you truly love it, then go for it.

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