

## ACOUSTIC GUITAR

JUNE 2006

### WOODY MANN

#### Road Trip

Woody Mann describes *Road Trip* as a tribute to the places he has visited on recent tours, but this excellent instrumental set from one of the most talented and eclectic fingerstyle guitarists on the scene can be heard, more metaphorically, as a recap of his musical journey. Mann has absorbed so many guitar styles that he can change moods on a dime, weaving lyrical single-string lines and chord harmonies that take his tunes across the musical divides between genres. “The Rev’s Music is a tribute to his first great teacher, legendary bluesman Reverend Gary



Davis, but Mann interprets Davis’ ideas through a jazz filter, giving the material a new perspective. “Kary’s Trance”, with saxophonist Charley Krachy, is a free jazz exploration that brings to mind Mann’s other great teacher, the groundbreaking Lennie Tristano. In *Road Trip*’s echoes of old-time banjo and classical guitar, sprightly Lonnie Johnson licks, and Latin themes, Mann makes good use of a bottomless bag of tricks. But for all his chops, he never showboats; everything he does serves the melody, a fact that his late teachers would certainly appreciate. (Acoustic Music Records, [www.acoustic-music.de](http://www.acoustic-music.de)). -IAN ZACK



SUMMER 2006



### WOODY MANN

#### Road Trip

Acoustic Music Records 1359 / Acoustic Sessions 215

Mann, who as a teenager recorded a series of duets with both Son House and JoAnn Kelly, is a fingerstyle guitar master as well as a talented songwriter and arranger. Influenced early on by string-bending legends like Lonnie Johnson and Blind Blake along with the ragtime and Gospel blues of Reverend Gary Davis, Mann eventually developed an exceptionally animated and colorfully nuanced, blues-based style all his own. Later, while studying with pianist Lenny Tristano, he began listening to jazz guitarists such as Charlie Christian and Eddie Lang, adding an elemental spontaneity and crafty use of time and space to his already exploratory musical approach.

“Road Trip was inspired by the many places I’ve traveled to recently and by artists like David ‘Honeyboy’ Edwards, John Cephas and David Bromberg that I’ve had the chance to play with along the way,” Mann comments. Songs like the swinging “Baden Baden”, “Texas Reel” and the reflective “Another Lisboa” tantalizingly demonstrate this theme. Scattered selections with pals like saxophonist Charlie Krachy (heard to nice advantage on the bop-pish “Kary’s Trance”), mandolinist Larry Wexer and pianist Dave Keys, who cleverly shadows Mann on the dilatory “Have Mercy”, vividly illustrate Mann’s arranging acumen.

Other favorites that, no doubt, also have fascinating stories behind them (even brief song notes would have been appreciated) include the old-timey jaunty “Back Woods,” a hauntingly melodic “Night in Tbilisi,” a bouncy tribute to Davis titled “The Rev’s Music,” a moody, percussively penetrating “Closing Time” and the kaleidoscopic “Warbase Junction.” Fans of Leo Kottke and John Fahey alike should give Mann a listen. -GVON T

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*...One of  
the most  
talented and  
eclectic guitarists  
on the scene...*

ACOUSTIC GUITAR MAGAZINE

*Mann is a  
gifted  
musician...*

*if he comes  
your way,*

*track him down*

LIVING BLUES MAGAZINE

”

#### contact info:

Acoustic Sessions Management: 160 Fifth Avenue, Suite 907, New York, NY 10010 Tel: 212.924.2066

Andrew Collins: [ac@acousticsessions.com](mailto:ac@acousticsessions.com).

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## LIVING BLUES

MARCH/APRIL 2006

### new releases

This set of 15 acoustic guitar instrumentals from New York-based Woody Mann is one of his most adventurous and creative outings to date. The set, on which all but three tracks are original compositions, is impressive and beautifully arranged, and he has surrounded himself with sympathetic and highly skilled fellow performers.

Mann is a gifted musician, writer, producer, and teacher; he is also a seasoned performer with a guitar touch and tone that are distinctly his own. He is versed in a wide range of musical styles, including jazz and classical, having studied with the likes of Lennie Tristano and the legendary Rev. Gary Davis. Mann spent a number of years during the late '60s taking lessons from Rev. Davis, and three titles pay homage to that guitar maestro. With *Have Mercy* Mann inventively interprets the passionate Davis classic *Death Don't Have No Mercy*, creating a haunting melody backed by evocative piano playing from Dave Keyes. Danny Mallon contributes subtle percussion on the Rev's *Music*, where Mann combines two of Davis' most popular songs, *Let Us Get Together* and *Going To Sit Down On The Bank Of The River*, into one of the highlights of this set.

The influence of Lonnie Johnson's infectious guitar playing shines through on *Through The Alley*, while the delicate picking on *Backwoods* (performed on a resonator guitar) has a timeless quality. *Warbasse Junction*, on which Mann is joined



by sax player Charlie Krachy, creates an evocative atmosphere reminding one of the late '50s sax style of Jimmy Giuffre. The blues guitar riff is engaging throughout the title.

Larry Wexer's mandolin sparkles on the *Poor Providence*, and the Portuguese-style guitar playing from Mann on *Closing Time* adds an atmospheric and eerie quality. Bass playing from Brian Glassman and drumming from Jeffrey Meyer are controlled and subtle throughout this session.

Mann is a consummate guitar player. In spite of his thorough knowledge of early blues and jazz styles, he is willing to experience and take chances as he does here. Mann is a regular visitor to Europe, and recent tours have included Japan and Brazil - if he comes your way, track him down!

-BOB TILLING

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“

*...Mann, who has recorded with both Son House and JoAnn Kelly, is a fingerstyle guitar master...*

SING OUT MAGAZINE

*From the very first song you could hear a pin drop and the greatly appreciative audience were totally captivated by this magical musician.*

JERSEY EVENING POST

”

## Blues Guitar Great's Spirit Lives on in Acoustically Inclined Composer

**A**fter spending the past weekend at the Vancouver Folk Music Festival I seem to have a ringing in my ears – but it's not tinnitus. Instead, it's the sound of dozens of acoustic guitars being strummed, plucked, or thwacked on the back like a drum: in a weekend that was crammed with good music, the one thing



**Woody Mann has stayed committed to the acoustic guitar since the 60s.**

### Off Beat ALEXANDER VARTY

that stood out was how much of it was performed on guitar. Festival highlights included Kelly Joe Phelps, Boubacar Traore, Keola Beamer, D'Gary, and Martin Carthy., guitar virtuosos all; taken with the Sonic Youth-initiated resurrection of fingerstyle pioneer John Fahey and the emergence of new strumming stars such as Ani DiFranco and Ben Harper, it definitely feels like the acoustic six-string is making a comeback.

Some would contend it never went away. "There seems to be a kind of perception that guitar-playing is somewhere on the fringe and always threatening to break down the front door, but it's a weird piece of psychology," says six-and 12-string guitar virtuoso Leo Kottke, who recently plays Richard's on Richards. "What I do know is that the guitar is the most popular instrument in North America. It outsells everything else, and everybody fiddles with one sooner or later, but it's definitely not, as far as I can see, having a groundswell or a resurgence. It's always been like this.

But New York City picker Woody Mann, who has kept the acoustic torch burning since the folk boom of the 1960s, things are definitely looking up. He credits a revival of interest in the acoustic guitar with giving his own career a major boost; without it, he says, he wouldn't have landed a recording deal with the Shanachie label, and he notes that though he has worked steadily in Europe for two decades, he's getting more and more offers to play in his own country.

He's understandably pleased with the state of guitaristic affairs – with one small exception. "This new 'acoustic guitar' umbrella encompasses everyone from singer-songwriters to straight-ahead jazz players... but there's no common thread, in a way, like there used to be in the blues scene or the jazz scene," he says, calling from Chicago's O'Hare International Airport during a layover between flights.

"So it's a funny kind of music world that's out there for guitar now. The only thing that I find missing in it is the jamming aspect. When you're a jazz musician, you all get together and say, 'Let's play "Take the A Train".' "Or if you're a folk musician, it's "Let's all play "Trouble in Mind", "or whatever. Now, everybody's such an individualist. I've done concerts with these fine, fine guitar players, and I'll say, "Let's all play a tune," and the only thing we can come up with is a 12-bar blues, maybe."

The lack of a common repertoire shouldn't be too much of a problem when Mann visits the Mission Folk Music Festival, which takes place at the Fraser River Heritage Park from Friday to Sunday (July 25 to 27). There, he'll have a willing and able duo partner in the form of Cortez Island singer, songwriter, and fingerstyle guitarist Rick Bockner. The two met at the Puget Sound Guitar Workshop a couple of years ago, and Mann says that they "kind of just hit it off". "We just started playing together," the New Yorker explains. "We're just kind of like old soul mates."

The two found common ground in the music of Reverend Gary Davis. Bockner, who grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, has arranged a number of the late gospel-blues guitar great's tunes for his own idiosyncratic, open-tuned style. Mann drank directly from the source, studying with the blind master from a very early age. But just as Bockner's airy, expansive playing incorporates Celtic and psychedelic dimensions, Mann's more harmonically sophisticated compositions betray the influence of another of his teachers, legendary jazz pianist Lenny Tristano.

"Davis was my first teacher when I was kid; I mean, I really learned how to play

guitar from him," he explains. "I'd just sit and mimic him, and I'd tape-record the lessons each week. It was really guitar stuff, but with Lenny it was really more improvisation, the straight-ahead jazz approach. I'd listen to Charlie Parker and I'd sing the solos and we'd study harmony and the scales and the triads... we'd really get into it. He was a real teacher, in that way. He didn't show me any songs; his whole concept of improvising was just simply to improvise. With Davis, the approach was "Here's the song I'm teaching you," but Lenny never showed me a song, never told me the chord changes to a tune... the lessons were very Zen, in a way."

Despite the jazz and classical inflections in his playing, Mann still thinks of himself as a blues performer, and his most recent release, *Heading Uptown*, bears this out. The disc includes a tribute to the great blues pianist Little Brother Montgomery and a Robert Johnson song; one of the standout tracks, the instrumental "Spanish Nights", links the Mississippi syncopations of Skip James's "Hard Time Killing Floor Blues" to the Moorish roots of flamenco.

Some purists might see this as a desecration of one of the eeriest and most powerful pieces in the blues repertoire, but Mann prefers to view his use of traditional forms within the context of a greater musical evolution.

"I used to play with people like Bukka White or Son House, and they would play whatever they knew," he explains. "If someone taught them a pop tune, they'd play that: whatever they could hear, they just played. So that's how they developed their style: they weren't saying "I'm staying in a certain blues style." Because of that, so much of the old blues is not 12 bars: it's pop songs, it's melodies, it's [early country singer] Jimmie Rodgers; it's a whole hodgepodge. If they could do it, they played it. Yet there was some kind of connecting feeling of the blues. And I think of it the same way: I'll just try to write a tune based on some of the old melodies, "cause that's what I hear in my head. I just see the blues tradition as a growing tradition. It's not like it's isolated in time, and you have to play blues like a museum piece."

There's no fear of that when Mann's onstage. Thirty years of touring and teaching have deepened his art but not petrified it; he's still searching for new forms of expression, and as long as he does that there'll be no time for cobwebs to settle on his strings.

“  
One of today's  
truly outstanding  
acoustic guitarists,  
influenced by Robert  
Johnson, Blind  
Blake, Eddie  
Lang, Lonnie  
Johnson and the  
masterful  
Rev. Gary  
Davis;  
influences that  
crystallize into  
the unique  
music of  
Woody Mann.

GUITAR MAGAZINE

### contact info:

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## BLUES™ revue

WOODY MANN  
THE FRET HOUSE  
COVINA, CALIF., JULY 18

BY BOB ZEUSCHNER



PHOTOGRAPHY © BOB ZEUSCHNER

On a hot Saturday night in July, Woody Mann demonstrated his incredible mastery of acoustic fingerstyle guitar before a rapt Southern California audience at the Fret House, a Los Angeles acoustic music landmark.

If you have ever studied the acoustic blues masterpieces of the 1920s through the 50s, then you likely know the name Woody Mann. You may have Mann's instruction books, videotapes or cassettes, and know that his reputation for providing faithful transcriptions of classic blues is well-deserved. He comes by his knowledge in the most legitimate manner possible. He was one of the select group of young men who studied guitar with the Rev. Gary Davis in New York in the 1960s, and he later played with giants such as the legendary Son House and Bukka White.

Mann's concert began with a jaunty, jazzy instrumental; the second piece of the evening was a song inspired by Little Brother Montgomery's only hit, "Vicksburg Blues." The influence of both jazz and blues was evident throughout the evening, even in the two Portuguese *fado* songs that the personable Mann described while re-tuning his guitar. The majority of the songs and instrumen-

tals were solidly crafted original compositions in various tunings and were rhythmically quite complex.

Mann has incorporated into his own repertoire the intricate blues runs and patterns he learned while mastering the songs of giants such as Davis, Scrapper Blackwell, Lonnie Johnson, Big Bill Broonzy and Blind Blake. One example is "Country Fair," his four-part instrumental tribute to the improvisations of Davis. Mann recalled how Davis stressed the danceability of the blues when giving guitar lessons, then he invited the audience to dance the two-step along with the music.

Mann paid tribute to Eddie Lang, the incredible jazz guitarist of the 1920s and '30s, improvising on three Lang pieces during the performance. In fact, many of the evening's tunes were homages, including "Top Hat," inspired by the Bahamian guitarist Joseph Spence, "Snooks," in the style of the great Snooks Eaglin, and several humorous tunes, including one about raising money in the name of the Lord, "I've Got The Nod of the Man Above."

After the intermission, Mann returned to his roots. Several songs were expressive reinterpretations of classic blues, including Skip James' "Hard Time Killing Floor," Robert Johnson's "Kindhearted Woman," and "Try Me One More Time," a piece Mann related to his duets with the late, great British blueswoman JoAnn Kelly. He also did extended variations on "Chump Man Blues," by the legendary Blind Blake. The two-and-a-half hour evening ended with "Heading East," a train song inspired by the 42nd Street cross-town bus.

Mann's mastery of fingerstyle guitar is astonishing, and in person the precision of his playing is even more amazing than on his CDs. His fingers are up and down the fingerboard, with every note of every chord loud and clear — no buzzes, no missed notes. The performance was at times introspective and at times exuberant, and the appreciative, knowledgeable audience responded loudly after each piece, leaving no doubt that Woody Mann puts on a great show.

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“  
(Mann) has a style that is completely his own... his tunes obliterated the boundaries separating Jazz, Celtic Reels, and country Blues. Manns intricate finger work is so fast and clean he makes extremely complicated passages sound deceptively simple.”

SANTA BARBARA PRESS

”

**Review:** Woody Mann / Arts Centre

**BY PETER MOURANT**

## Blues brilliance from a master guitarist



Woody Mann stopped over in Jersey last night en route from New York to Amsterdam, where he will be appearing for the first time. He may already be known to local audiences, but no matter how many times you see him perform, his guitar-playing remains peerless. The Dutch are in for a rare treat.

Taking advantage of the quiet atmosphere in the Arts Centre – ‘no cash registers or tinkling glasses’ – Woody was able to play with the restraint that his delicate touch deserves, captivating the audience on many self-composed numbers.

### Old Jazz Tunes

‘Cheap Cherry Wine’ is a wistful tale of a search for the great bluesman Willie Brown and ‘Snooks’ was dedicated to a blind street musician, Snooks Eaglin. The instrumental ‘A Little Love, A Little Kiss’ was based on old jazz tunes, little snippets thrown together to create an evocative sound.

The second half of his set opened with Blind Blake’s ‘Good Gal’ and was followed by his own ‘God Works in Mysterious Ways’, a powerful song about the callous killing of homeless children in Brazil. Another instrumental loosely described as a ‘New York Spanish blues jig’ proved a real highlight – a fandango merged into an Irish jig, weaving in and out of the blues; just as you recognized something and smiled he was onto the next part.

The self-effacing Woody Mann charmed his audience with a set that defies pigeon-holing even into a genre as wide as the blues; his brilliant technique merges classical, jazz and blues into something truly his own, and any guitarists in the audience may have been inspired – or, more likely, made to feel like taking up another instrument altogether.

Just don’t make it the clarinet, because he’s brilliant on that as well.

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*On Heading Uptown the various strands of the guitar maestro’s varied career have merged into a mature and rewarding piece of work.*

FOLK ROOTS MAGAZINE



“I’m trying to bring in all the elements that I am, jazz and blues, and just trying to put it together in my own way. To try to make the guitar the focal point, rather than playing straight blues or straight jazz,” says Woody Mann.

## TIMEOFF

**BY ALEX SAVILLE**

### The Natural One

**Woody Mann – who combines blues, jazz and fingerstyle guitar playing – deserves some fanfare specifically because he doesn’t seek it.**

Guitarist Woody Mann wasn’t at first about playing the Curtains Calls celebration in Princeton Dec. 31. “Usually, with New Year’s Eve gigs, I have a little trepidation about accepting,” he says. “But this sounded like whole different kind of New Year’s Eve thing, because it’s in a concert setting, and not some noisy restaurant with party favors and all that stuff.”

Mr. Mann has played a lot in Europe, where performances tend to be treated differently than here. Most of them are funded by cultural commissions or the government. So when he heard Curtains Calls was put on by the Arts Council and his performance would be in quiet venues (Princeton University Chapel and McCosh Hall) he figured this was worth playing.

Mr. Mann has been booked as a blues guitar player, a folk-fingerstyle player, a jazz guitarist and a singer-songwriter. He says he can perform in any of those styles, but when he’s really being himself, he incorporates all of his influences. That is why European audiences have been so receptive to his music.

“When I do a concert over there people come because it’s a concert, a cultural event,” he says. “I can play blues and jazz and folk music, I can kind of play whatever I want to play and under that cover it works.”

When he was 13, he started playing the guitar. He was playing folk music mostly, and had heard a couple of tunes by Rev. Gary Davis, a master of blues and ragtime guitar. Then he heard that Rev. Davis lived in New York City.

“I just called him up out of the phone book,” he says remembering his excitement. “I just went over to his house and then ever since that day I was hooked. He was the one that got me started on the guitar and from him, then I really got into it.”

“He was really patient. I still have my lessons on tape and it’s amazing when I listen to it today how patient he was. This little bratty kid coming over there. He was totally cool and into teaching me. I’d end up spending the whole day over there and his wife Annie would cook dinner and it would be a whole day-long affair. That was my life, all through high school. That really focused my attention on blues and history.”

It was this patience and kindness that really helped turn Mr. Mann into a guitarist. In school, he played clarinet, and was good enough with it to be accepted to The Juilliard School. Later he studied under Chicago-born pianist Lennie Tristano, who opened Mr. Mann’s musical world to include the infinite possibilities of jazz.

Mr. Mann, who teaches at the New School for Social Research in New York, has written a number of books, including the definitive, complete transcription of Robert Johnson’s music.

Although he is still known more for playing the blues, he has been working hard in recent years to broaden his range – as well as his image.

“What I’m doing now is I’m trying to bring in all the elements that I am, jazz and blues, and just trying to put it together in my own way,” Mr. Mann says. “To try to make the guitar the focal point rather than playing straight blues or straight jazz. Try to create your own voice and bring those elements in: that’s what I try to do.”

He brings an easy style to his music and his live performances, with the confidence of the seasoned, accomplished musician he is.

“I don’t feel I have to prove myself as a guitarist,” he says. “I don’t feel I have to get up there and blow everybody away. That’s silly. That’s never been natural to me. The idea is to go up and to be yourself and to be entertaining and you’re putting on a show for people. It’s that kind of communication. To be able to share what I do with people, in a way that’s musically satisfying to me, not just show biz.”

“It’s a constant journey. It always changes; I’m always learning. Every tour I do I learn something new; every gig I learn something new. And I’m trying to keep that channel open. That’s what feels good. At least if I’m performing, that I’m growing, that’s the most important thing.”

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## ACOUSTIC MUSICIAN



**WOODY MANN**  
*STAIRWELL SERENADE*  
Acoustic Music Records  
Best.Nr.319.1072.242

The songs on Woody Mann's latest release, *Stairwell Serenade*, were mostly improvised in the studio. All songs are original, solo, instrumental, acoustic guitar pieces. Mann is a great technician, and the styles at which he is adept include jazz, blues, ragtime, classical and just about anything else that seems to enter his mind. What is remarkable is how he can draw from several styles and techniques within a single song, and have them blend without a feeling of inconsistency. Of interest are several songs where Mann sights his influence as direct inspirations behind specific songs, two referencing the Rev. Gary Davis, and two more reminiscent of Joseph Spence. The Davis inspired tunes beautifully capture Davis' great bass style, something that few of the Gary Davis' musical imitators can accomplish. The Spence-derived tunes demonstrate what the great Bahamian guitarist may have sounded like had he had his personal esthetic intact, combined with a more technically accurate approach to the guitar. The CD is well recorded and captures the ambience of the acoustic guitar very effectively. Woody Mann's performance is inspired and interesting from start to finish. (SE)

## MUSICIAN

M A G A Z I N E

### WOODY MANN *Stairwell Serenade* (Acoustic Music Records)

Gifted as a teacher and player of finger-style guitar, Mann here makes a convincing case for himself as a composer and improviser as well. Sometimes he goes for a new agey, abstract expressionism, and sometimes he goes for neoclassical concrete expressionism, and still other times he goes for variations on country blues themes. He nails very complicated stuff so cleanly that optimists will grab their guitars, thinking, "Hey, that's humanly possible," while pessimists will get drunk and spread dark rumors about moral turpitude.

## GuitarPlayer.



Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, *Labyrinth*  
Chris Whitley, *Din of Ecstasy*  
Main, *Motion Pool*  
Woody Mann, *Stairwell Serenade*  
Dave Allen and the Arrows,  
*Loud, Loose and Savage*  
Sonny Landreth, *South of I-10*  
Ben Harper, *Fight for Your Mind*  
The Mermen, *A Glorious Lethal Euphoria*  
Ani DiFranco, *Not a Pretty Girl*

“

*...Dazzling and technically flawless finger style guitar at its most listenable. Manns wizardry on the fret board is matched by his ability to convey deep feelings with his songs- creating moods that incite, delight, or simply soothe.*

*“Throughout (the recording), Mann blurs the lines between jazz, blues, classical, and world music creating his own sound in the process. Attempts to categorize his music simply misses the point. This is brilliant playing that demands to be heard.*

SING OUT MAGAZINE

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## DOWN BEAT

Woody Mann: *Heading Uptown*  
(Shanachie 8025; 43:09: ★★★★★)

Connecting folk and blues, Woody Mann fingerpicks his acoustic guitar with complete assurance on a dozen songs that collectively take your breath away. His percussive style owes something to former teacher Reverend Gary Davis and his attention to structure probably derives from studies with Lennie Tristano. Mann can also really sing, he's expressive in an understated way, and he's written (or co-written) all the songs but one. Robert Johnson's "Kindhearted Woman Blues" receives a wonderful makeover. In a few places, Mann's voice and guitar are joined by reserved piano, accordion, percussion or support singing. DB

## Blues Connection

VOLUME 4  
ISSUE 10

### WOODY MANN

*Heading Uptown* Shanachie 8025

For the acoustic guitar nut, Woody Mann and Shanachie have released a wild collection of music which ranges from modern music, classic swing style, to good old delta blues. Keep in mind it was Woody Mann who recently published the definitive book of tablature for Robert Johnson's guitar style which appeared in 1995. This is the same Woody Mann who published the ground breaking tab book in 1973, *Six Black Blues Guitarists* (recent editions have been retitled *Six Old Blues Guitarists*).

Most of this CD contains Mann's own compositions, but none of the music strays too far from the styles of fingerpicking guitar Mann has distinguished himself for. The Robert Johnson freaks will be happy with the version on "Kinhearted Woman" he added to this collection. For those who are unfamiliar with Mann's vocals, you'll be satisfied with his more than adequate delivery, but it's the guitar playing which comes forward. Even during the most heartfelt vocals Woody Mann accompanies the lyrics with the most involved guitar parts. Then on the instrumentals the guitar playing becomes blistering, blazing examples of virtuosity. He attains various voicing by using both 12 string and six string guitars. On some numbers Mann is joined by Charles Giordano playing accordion which contrasts nicely.

Overall, this project is a satisfying and interesting product of one of the great practitioners playing acoustic guitar in America today.

— Tom Olsen



### WOODY MANN

Jersey Arts Center, St. Helier

Many readers will know of Woody, who is based in New York City, through his writing and teaching, and, of course, because of his friendship with the Rev. Gary Davis. It was the 'guitar master' Rev. Davis who was Woody's first 'teacher' and great influence, but other teachers have included the magnificent jazz pianist Lennie Tristano. Apart from performing many classic country blues songs, for which Woody is well



known, including Bo Carter's *Who's Been Here* and Josh White's *Good Gal* he also was to perform many of his own original compositions.

In recent years Woody has been working with the lyricist Steve Calt, who many may know for his authoritative blues writings. One of their most striking titles *Cheap Cherry Wine*, with the melody loosely based on Mance Lipscomb's *Charlie James*, mentions Willie Brown, the one time sidekick of Son House and Robert Johnson. It is a beautiful and atmospheric song which was enthusiastically received by the audience. In one of his most emotive and powerful songs *God Works in Mysterious Ways*, inspired by Blind Willie Johnson, Woody comments on the tragic random killings that are taking place in Brazil. These original titles were for me among the highlights of the evening.

Throughout this relaxed concert, enhanced by his pleasant stage manner, Woody spoke of many of the great guitar players that he enjoys including Skip James, Big Bill Broonzy and Lonnie Johnson. He used these magnificent and original players to illustrate his own skills as an inventive and improvisational musician. It was very entertaining, and inspiration to the guitar players in the audience, to watch how he would take traditional styles and weave them into his own, while losing nothing for their original intention.

The two hour concert seemed to fly by very quickly and there was no doubt everyone in the beautiful Arts Centre theatre were impressed by this very engaging musician. His authority as a guitarist was quite outstanding complemented with some fine singing. Hopefully he will return before too long and I strongly recommend you to go along if he is in your area.

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*The performance was at times introspective and at times exuberant, and the appreciative, knowledgeable audience responded loudly after each piece, leaving no doubt that Woody Mann puts on a great show.”*

BLUES REVIEW MAGAZINE

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## Guitar Player

Picks



•**Woody Mann, *Stairwell Serenade***, Acoustic Music (Postfach 1945, D-49009 Osnabrück, Germany), and ***Stories***, Greenhays/Flying Fish (1304 W. Schubert, Chicago, IL 60614): Even John Fahey weighs in on the liner notes about what a criminally unsung acoustic great this cat is. On *Stories* Mann updates Blind Blake and Blind Boy Fuller and lays down urbane jazz-Delta originals. *Stairwell* features 13 gorgeous solo improvs, some exploiting themes inspired by Joseph Spence, Charley Patton, and Mann's former teacher, Rev. Gary Davis. With impeccable tone production, gutsy phrasing, beautiful harmonies, and cool dynamics, Mann is in a class by himself. Phenomenal.



**WOODY MANN**  
***Stairwell Serenade***  
Acoustic Music 319.1072.2

Guitarist Woody Mann's second outing is a stunning all-instrumental set of originals (save the Rogers and Hart standard "Spring Is Here") that present him at his best – playing dazzling and technically flawless fingerstyle guitar at its most listenable. Mann's wizardry on the fret board is matched by his ability to convey deep feeling with his songs – creating moods that incite, delight, or simply soothe.

The guitarist pays tribute to several influences on this stunning aural journey, including his former teacher, the legendary Rev. Gary Davis. Both "Buggy Wagon" and the lighthearted rag "Country Fair" are drawn from this deep well of inspiration. The latter song begins with a tape of Davis from a lesson in the 1960s, encouraging his student to play "what you know". Mann also tips his hat to the likes of Bahamian guitarist Joseph Spence with the percussive stop-start rhythms of "Top Hat" and forceful "Bahama Mama." Mann's songs are filled with sensual imagery that creates vivid musical portraits. One can almost feel the cool breeze hovering by on the delicately moving "Harlequin," or smell the Mississippi River on the Delta-styled "Green River Rising." Throughout, Mann blurs the lines between jazz, blues, classical and world music creating his own unique sound in the process. Attempts to categorize his music simply miss the point. This is brilliant playing that demands to be heard. –ME

## ACOUSTIC MUSICIAN

Every now and then, you hear a guitarist whose sound is completely his own and whose music flirts with several styles,

never resting for very long with just one. **Woody Mann** is an artist who seems to have internalized many different genres and combined them in a way that is certainly more than just the sum of its parts. His CD *Stories* (Greenhays GR70724) features a good deal of this amazing guitar work.

### contact info:

Acoustic Sessions Management: 160 Fifth Avenue, Suite 907, New York, NY 10010 Tel: 212.924.2066  
Andrew Collins: ac@acousticssessions.com  
Visit [www.woodymann.com](http://www.woodymann.com) for downloadable photos, mp3's, and detailed info.

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*Woody Mann picks his acoustic guitar with complete assurance on a dozen songs that collectively take your breath away.*

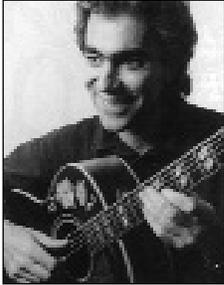
★★★★

DOWN BEAT MAGAZINE

*“Woody's vocals are better than ever. Its always a pleasure to witness an artist who just keeps getting better. This (“Heading Uptown” CD) has to be Woody Mann's best album yet. Positively inspiring.*

FOLK ROOTS MAGAZINE

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**WOODY MANN**  
Heading Uptown Shanachie 8025

Just hearing the first few seconds of Woody Mann's latest CD you know that this is going to be something special. On *Heading Uptown* the various strands of the guitar maestro's varied career have merged into a mature and rewarding piece of work. From the living room of Reverend Gary Davis to the Julliard School of Music; from being instructed by jazz pianist Lennie Tristano to instructing Paul Simon; from trading blues licks with Son House and Bukka White to collaborating with John Fahey and our own Jo Anne Kelly; from accompanying Dory Previn to playing solo...

Woody Mann has been there and done that. There are many elements from Woody's musical past on this CD but his achievement is in bringing them together in (seemingly) effortless fashion while striking for something new, fresh and contemporary.

While Woody is the first to admit that he's not a bluesman, the blues does act as a touchstone for a good number of these pieces either coming out of a musical motif or from a lyrical/subject standpoint (on *Little Brother* the lyrics weave a tale around the pianist Little Brother Montgomery and his *Vicksburg Blues*). The opening track *So Glad* is an instrumental reworking of Skip James' *I'm So Glad* and James' guitar part for *Hard Time Killing Floor* surfaces with Spanish tinges as *Spanish Nights*. Other blues guitarists alluded to include Lonnie Johnson, Sleepy John Estes, Bo Carter and, of course, Gary Davis – all having their styles incorporated and embellished into Woody's contemporised. Only Robert Johnson escapes the full treatment on *A Kindhearted Woman* where Woody plays the guitar part pretty straight although he and Stephen Calt do re-write the words.

There are touches of jazz and gospel (*Nearer to God Than Thee* takes a hefty sideswipe at that traditional target – the greedy preacher) but, overall, this album heads uptown in a decidedly chic contemporary mode. Adding to the feel are four guest musicians – Danny Mallon on percussion, Dave Keyes on piano, Charlie Giordano on accordion and Terre Roche singing backing vocals – but mostly it's Woody's inventively fluid guitar (beautifully recorded) that takes centre stage. And now Woody's vocals are better than ever, having gained confidence and authority over a passage of time. It's always a pleasure to witness an artist who just keeps getting better. This has to be Woody Mann's best album yet. Positively inspiring! –Dave Peabody

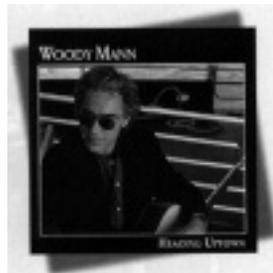


**WOODY MANN Stories**  
GREENHAYS 70724



Woody Mann is an underground folk/blues legend whose wonderfully rich, adventurous, and harmonically inventive fingerstyle guitar playing interweaves classical and jazz styles and more. *Stories* features five impressive solo guitar pieces that are alternately technically dazzling and lyrical, but always inspiring. Defying classification, the seven vocal selections range from a tribute to bluesman Snooks Eaglin ("Snooks") to sociopolitical commentary ("The Family Man") and contemporary portraiture ("East Side Story"). An impressive solo outing from someone who deserves to be better known. (42 min.) –John DeAngelis

## ACOUSTIC MUSICIAN



**WOODY MANN**  
*HEADING UPTOWN*  
Shanachie Records 8025

There's a great quote on the back of the CD case from John Fahey. That alone would be tribute enough, but John Fahey says, and I quote, "For too long, Woody Mann has been one of America's best kept musical secrets. If there was a category simply called Great Music, Woody's playing would belong there." I don't believe there is anything I can say here that would eclipse what John Fahey summed up in 28 words. The performances are inspired. His playing is very fluid with a voice that makes this recording very easy to listen to.

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*There are no rambling New Age guitar noodlings here: these tunes have vibrancy and life...an enormously talented and accomplished guitarist.*

FOLK ROOTS MAGAZINE

*Stairwell Serenade's 13 tracks contain no overdubs or dazzling electronic effects— just Mann's remarkable facility with six strings and a bunch of seasoned wood.*

DIRTY LINEN MAGAZINE



## ACOUSTIC GUITAR

S O L O



### AND 3 NOT 4

MUSIC BY  
WOODY MANN

Although most guitarists learn from a variety of mentors and sources in the course of their musical development, not many have studied simultaneously with one of the great bluesmen and at one of the world's most renowned classical music schools. Woody Mann began his studies with the Reverend Gary Davis at the age of 14 and attended the Julliard prep school program (playing clarinet) while still in high school. He went on to study at Julliard at the college level, majoring in composition, and then turned to jazz. Mann's hip original pieces, such as the featured "And 3 Not 4" off his most recent album, *Heading Uptown*, blend many of his diverse influences.

Although Gary Davis is responsible for an entire generation of fingerstyle blues guitarists, few of his former disciples sound as original and fresh as Mann. Perhaps his original voice is due to what he calls the

"sense of form" his years of classical music study gave him. Or maybe it's just a constant striving to find his own way. "When I studied with Davis, I copied him of course," says Mann, but I never wanted to perform his music like a straight cop because unless I could do it better or different, why perform it?" Davis' influence continues to show in Mann's playing and in his writing. "To him, it was a discipline of getting the chops and the sounds," Mann explains. "Everything was the sound. And I think that's what I gleaned from him. He'd play a riff, and he'd say, 'No no, that's not it,' even though the notes were all there. It was the sound and the swing and all those inner things. It wasn't just the song; it was the approach. This has become a part of my playing. When I write a tune, I always think of him."

While studying with Davis (Mann's mother would drive him to his lessons in the Bronx from their home in the suburbs of Long Island), Mann got acquainted with the local blues scene. One of the key people he met was Nick Perls, who owned Yazoo records and let the young Mann listen to his extensive collection of old 78s. Perls also introduced him to legendary players when they came through town. "Nick would call me up and say 'Hey, Son House is in town,'" Mann recalls. "I recently found all these tapes of Son House and myself, and Joanne Kelly from England, and Bill Williams, and Bukka White, so I'm trying to put a record project together of all of those."

After this intense early exposure to folk and blues, Mann began shifting his focus toward jazz and found a mentor in pianist Lennie Tristano. "He was into improvising," says Mann, "not so much jazz; just sort of learning to make your own music. I studied a lot of the things with him I had learned in classical school but never applied to the guitar: scales, arpeggios, triads, seventh chords, singing solos..."

Mann began playing in trios around New York City, and it soon became clear that learning music from a non-guitar point of view was resulting in a new voice on the instrument. "In a way, I felt very inadequate as a jazz player, because everyone was learning these hip Wes [Montgomery] solos, and I didn't learn any of that," Mann recalls. "It was just improvising. Even now, when I play jazz, I pick it up and do it my own way. I don't have a lot of the stock-in-trade, Joe Pass-type licks. I play all the standards, but in my own way."

Mann says that the tune "And 3 Not 4" is "basically a take-off on a tune of Lenny Tristano's called '2 Not 1' that starts on the second beat. I had been thinking about writing a song to open the show, just something easy, light and loose, to loosen up. I was just horsing around in the studio with [percussionist] Danny Mallon. It was just this little riff I was fooling around with – it was very spontaneous. Then we came up with the B section. Since I've been performing it, I keep adding new parts and sections to it. It's very guitaristic."

On the CD version of "And 3 Not 4," the guitar is accompanied only by sparse percussion. The tune combines a solid and catchy melody in the A section with gorgeous, fat jazz voicings in the B section and a middle section that evokes the comping of a modern jazz piano player. The tune shouldn't be too difficult for the intermediate fingerstyle player, although it might introduce some unfamiliar chord extensions. Hearing Mann perform the piece live brings home the importance of keeping the groove going and also proves its potential for improvisation.

Besides maintaining a hectic touring schedule, Mann keeps busy with a variety of projects. In 1997, he produced late guitarist Atilla Zoller's last and only solo recording, *Lasting Love* (Acoustic Music), which kindled his interest in producing. In addition to composing new material for an upcoming album (most likely with a trio), Mann has been studying *fado* music on the Portuguese guitar and was invited to perform at the 1998 Lisbon Expo. The author of many guitar books and tapes, he is currently planning an instructional method based on his hours and hours of taped lessons with Reverend Gary Davis. This summer he will also be teaching at the International Acoustic Blues and Slide Workshop in New York City from June 12 to June 17 (for details, contact the seminar coordinator, Trevor Laurence, at PO Box 903, Times Square Station, New York, NY 10108; [516] 767-8718; www.guitarseminars.com). Located on the Columbia University campus, the workshop will feature a core faculty of Mann, Bob Brozman, Martin Simpson, and John Cephas.

—Teja Gerken

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The self effacing  
Woody Mann  
charmed his  
audience with  
a set that defies  
pigeon-holing even  
into a genre as wide  
as blues: his brilliant  
technique merges his  
jazz and classical  
ideas into something  
truly his own.  
The guitarists in the  
audience may have  
been inspired – or,  
more likely, made to  
feel like taking up  
another instrument  
altogether. From the  
very first song you  
could hear a pin drop  
and the greatly appreciative audience were  
totally captivated by  
this magical musician.

JERSEY EVENING POST

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