

From left: Jeff Stein, Perry Smith and John Storie



New West Guitar Group *Industrious Attitude*

The do-it-yourself concept has become a glaring reality for many working musicians today. The members of New West Guitar Group know all about the DIY approach, and their hard work has paid off. This young, innovative trio is making its mark with intrepid live performances and an industrious attitude.

The West Coast-based group blossomed out of the University of Southern California's guitar program. Perry Smith, John Storie, Brady Cohan and Matt Roberts were all guitar students with a love for straight-ahead jazz. "Part of getting a degree [involved playing] in the guitar ensemble. So they put Perry and me together with these other two guys," says Storie. "At first, I thought this was gonna be silly—four guitar players and no rhythm section. But then it actually clicked for us and we started doing a lot of arrangements, standards and transcriptions of solos."

The quartet began composing material. They used money from the coveted USC Thornton Protégé grant to fund their first full-length album, 2005's *Introducing New West Guitar Quartet*. On the strength of that CD, the group toured Japan and, with assistance from the university, developed a relationship with the Los Angeles Bureau of Tourism. Networking with the bureau got them work throughout Europe. They also kept active by doing sideman and session gigs on the L.A. music scene.

One of their biggest challenges came when they were devising a promotional model shortly after their debut. "We were trying to figure out how to describe this group," explains Storie. "We wanted to create a new, original sound for guitars. In 2007 we released *Wide Awake*. We featured acoustic guitars on that album, so we

worked that into the description of the group."

The musicians, who are influenced by Wes Montgomery, Grant Green and Bill Frisell, incorporated elements of folk, classical, country, blues and rock into their ample repertoire.

After the *Live At Rosalie And Alva's* DVD for Mel Bay Productions in 2008, Roberts left the group. The remaining members recorded the all-acoustic album *Sleeping Lady* in 2009.

"We realized right away that [as a trio] our sound was easier to balance, and the arrangements were a little cleaner in the solo sections," explains Smith. "The dynamics were better, and I started writing with the acoustic being the main rhythmic element in the band, working almost like the drummer's ride cymbal."

Cohan left at the end of 2009 and was replaced by current member and fellow USC alum Jeff Stein. The next milestone was their 2011 Summit Records release, *Round-Trip Ticket*.

"We knew we wanted to put this current record out on a label that would get our music in front of some new listeners," Storie explains. "It's worked out great. They're like a chamber group label that has a lot of brass quintets. And we are sort of a chamber group."

"*Round-Trip Ticket* is the first record that truly represents how we sound live," says Stein. "The compositions are there to serve a true composed effect instead of [being] simply head-solo-head. There are a few tunes with some stretched-out solos, but for the most part, the solos are built into the compositions for the bigger scheme of propelling the tunes forward. And that's more [like] combining chamber or classical writing with jazz music."

—Eric Harabadian

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