

NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

New York-Based Guitarist/Composer Ken Hatfield Releases Solo Guitar CD “String Theory” On Arthur Circle Music, January 17

“Ken Hatfield is setting new standards – both as a composer and guitarist – which mark him as a singular artist.”
– Jim Fisch, 20th Century Guitar

“Hatfield’s solos, like his compositions, are elegant, polished, and always energetic and absorbing...”
– Ron Forbes-Roberts, Acoustic Guitar

“The nylon-string guitar has no more powerful advocate on the current jazz scene than Ken Hatfield, whose virtuosic finger-style technique is matched by an exceptional compositional gift...”
– Rick Anderson, All Music Guide

Fans have learned to expect the unexpected from jazz guitarist and composer **KEN HATFIELD**, whose sixth CD as a leader, ***String Theory*** (Arthur Circle Music), finds him in a reflective mood, playing a series of deeply personal multi-movement works on the nylon-stringed classical guitar, either solo or in intricate and beautiful duets with himself on mandolin and dobro.

Hatfield’s Appalachian roots are showing. Remember the famous feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys? Ken is one of *those* Hatfields. While *String Theory* has as much Andres Segovia as Chet Atkins in it, there’s a distinct twang to some of this music that speaks to the composer’s childhood in Norfolk, Virginia, where country music was part of the landscape. *String Theory* is a record for people who like *guitar*, period, and fans of John Fahey and Leo Kottke will appreciate it as much as confirmed Wes Montgomery addicts.

“It’s funny,” says Hatfield, “but when I was undergoing my apprenticeship as a working musician, playing with organists Jack McDuff and Jimmy McGriff, they gave me nicknames like ‘Cornbread,’ ‘Hillbilly’ and ‘John Boy.’ To me, the hillbilly thing and country music were the antithesis of the image I wanted as a serious jazz guy, so I had some difficulty with that. It became a barrier to getting in touch with that part of my background. So that’s some of what’s happening on this album: returning to my roots.”

Before recording *String Theory*, Hatfield hadn’t touched the dobro for six years, or the mandolin in twenty, but he plays both with considerable panache. There’s a nod here to the progressive country played by dobro virtuoso Jerry Douglas, banjo master Bela Fleck and mandolin player David Grisman, but other strands include classical and the Brazilian music Hatfield loves (and frequently records).

The opening sonata for guitar and dobro, “The Gospel According to Sam,” is a tribute to Hatfield’s father, now 85. Sam Hatfield is a real character, known for an endless supply of colorful sayings that young Ken absorbed. “Once when a club owner started to deduct the cost of a glass of water from the band’s pay, I responded by saying that the club owner was ‘tighter than a fish’s ass, and that’s watertight.’ Musicians would ask me where all this country wit came from, and I’d always credit my father. They encouraged me to put together a book of his more outlandish sayings, but instead I created a musical homage to him.”

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Some of Hatfield’s inspiration is literary. The 13-part “Snowhill Variations,” played entirely on guitar, was drawn from a story by Thomas Mann, in which a character speculates that music is such a natural art that even a talented novice with no knowledge of its conventions could reinvent them if he or she paid close attention to the implications of sound. One Johann Beissel, who formed a religious order in Snowhill, Pennsylvania, invented his own form of vocal music, and Hatfield’s piece is a series of variations on an imagined theme by that long-ago composer.

Similarly, the seven-part suite “Borges and I,” is also played on classical guitar. Each of its movements was inspired by the Jorge Luis Borges short story for which it is named. “Borges’ writing is unbelievable,” Hatfield enthuses. “Dealing with the concepts he expresses can lead you to reexamine your view of reality. Borges’ *fictiones* often obscure the boundaries between poetry and the short story. He somehow manages to address the most profound aspects of the human condition in the most succinct terms. For instance, in ‘Argumentum Ornithologicum,’ within one concise paragraph Borges poetically contemplates the relationship between perception and the existence of God.”

The title composition, “String Theory,” is a three-movement sonata for mandolin and guitar, and it was influenced by Hatfield’s interest in art and science. “I always look for a unifying principle to hold things together, and ‘String Theory’ seemed the obvious choice to unite these diverse pieces,” comments Hatfield, in the liner notes. Not surprising, then, that the album’s cover reproduces a Henry Moore drawing of an audience considering a tightly wrapped monolith tied up with string. Unlocking the secrets of music and art, that’s one way of describing guitarist Ken Hatfield’s ongoing mission.

KEN HATFIELD’S compositional experience covers a wide range of styles and instrumentations. In addition to composing jazz works for his own ensembles, he has written chamber pieces that range from solo classical guitar to string quartet and mixed ensembles of various sizes. He has composed choral works and ballet scores, including commissioned works for Judith Jamison, The Washington Ballet Company, and the Maurice Béjart Ballet Company. And he has written scores for television and film, including Eugene Richards’ award-winning documentary *but, the day came*. Arthur Circle Music has published four books of Hatfield’s compositions, and Mel Bay has just published his book *Jazz and the Classical Guitar: Theory and Application*, which is designed to demonstrate Ken’s unique approach to playing jazz on a classical guitar.

Besides performing as a solo artist and with his various ensembles at such prestigious venues as The JVC Jazz Festival, The Knitting Factory, The Classic American Guitar Show, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the Whitney Sculpture Court, and the North Wales International Jazz Guitar Festival, Hatfield has performed and/or recorded with Charlie Byrd, Jack McDuff, Chico Hamilton, Jimmy McGriff, Melissa Manchester, Marilyn McCoo and Billy Davis, Stephanie Mills, Linda Hopkins, Billy Daniels, Pat Benatar, Maurice Hines, Charles Aznavour, Bob Cranshaw, Grady Tate, Harold Maburn, Brian Torff, Marcus Miller, Kenny Kirkland, Dom Salvador, João Donato, Claudio Roditi, Lew Tabackin, Kenny Werner, Ben E. King, Eddie Kendricks, Marlena Shaw, Vivian Reed, Z.Z. Hill, and Toni Braxton.

www.kenhatfield.com

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