

Ken Hatfield
Guitarist, Composer, Arranger, Educator

Described as “a veritable Picasso of the jazz guitar world” (*20th Century Guitar*), and “one of the most skilled, creative, and original guitarist/composers currently recording” (*Acoustic Guitar*), nylon-string guitarist **Ken Hatfield** is known for his formidable fingerstyle technique and original compositional voice that draws on influences as diverse as jazz, blues, classical, Brazilian, and Appalachian music. His important contributions as a composer have earned him wide recognition, including the **prestigious ASCAP Foundation Jazz Vanguard Award** for “innovative and distinctive music that is charting new directions in jazz” (2006).

Hatfield’s eleven CDs as a leader demonstrate his tremendous gifts as a composer, performer and arranger, and attest to his consistently high level of artistry. His latest release, *Stirrings Still* (2023) with Eric Hoffman, is an intimate set of duets for voice and guitar. His 2013 sextet release *For Langston*, a jazz song cycle in which he set to music poems by Langston Hughes, was described by Marc Myers as “an uplifting, spiritual jazz tribute that treats its subject seriously but with joyous lyricism. . . . Easily one of the finest tribute albums so far this year” (JazzWax.com). 2006’s *String Theory*, which highlights Hatfield’s technical virtuosity and versatility as he performs a group of original works composed for classical guitar, dobro, and mandolin, was lauded by Andy Ellis in *Guitar Player* for its “fresh guitar sounds and novel concepts” and “brainy, dynamic, and relentlessly melodic” playing. His 2003 trio release *The Surrealist Table* was described by Ron Forbes-Roberts in *Acoustic Guitar* as “. . . an empathetic session brimming with beautifully realized musical ideas and stellar playing” and was chosen by Bill Milkowski in *JAZZIZ* as one of the top 20 acoustic guitar albums to have. And Hatfield’s 2002 ensemble recording *Phoenix Rising* was “Recommended for those with an affinity for the subtle and sublime” by Jim Ferguson in *JazzTimes*.

Arthur Circle Music has published six books of Hatfield’s compositions. His latest is 2016’s *12 Preludes for Solo Guitar* (w/companion CD) about which Raul da Gama wrote, “Hatfield’s fresh voice and genuine musicality warrant the placement of these *12 Preludes* in the vast classical prelude discography’s top tier” (worldmusicreport.com). In 2017 Mel Bay included two of Ken’s solo guitar compositions in *Contemporary Guitar Composers of the Americas*, and in 2005 they published his comprehensive instructional book *Jazz and the Classical Guitar: Theory and Application*, designed to demonstrate Ken’s unique approach to playing jazz on a classical guitar. His compositions and writings have also appeared in numerous jazz and guitar publications, including *DownBeat*, *Acoustic Guitar*, *Just Jazz Guitar*, *Fingerstyle Guitar*, and others.

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; choral works and ballet scores, including commissioned works for Judith Jamison, The Washington Ballet Company, and the Maurice Béjart Ballet Company; and scores for television and film, including Eugene Richards’ award-winning documentary *but, the day came*.

Ken has performed as a solo artist and with his ensembles in a variety of venues ranging from prestigious international festivals to intimate jazz clubs, including the JVC Jazz Festival, the North Wales International Jazz Guitar Festival, the Classic American Guitar Show, the Cathedral

of St. John the Divine, the Harrison Opera House, the Smithsonian Jazz Café, the Knitting Factory, and 55Bar. He has performed and/or recorded with artists and ensembles as diverse as The New York Pops, 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 Mabern, 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.

Hatfield began studying the guitar with John Griggs in his hometown of Norfolk, Virginia, before attending the Berklee College of Music, where he joined the faculty at the age of 19. He studied counterpoint and composition with Paul Caputo in New York City, and received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from the State University of New York.

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