

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

Pam Rosenblatt
**Jazz Guitarist Joe Weinberg:
Dedicated to the world of
Guitar**



On a comfortable Tuesday, March 25, 2014 afternoon, Wilderness House Literary Review arts editor Pam Rosenblatt met with jazz guitarist/guitar teacher Joe Weinberg over lunch at a restaurant in Waltham, Massachusetts. The two friends got together to discuss Weinberg's career and ambitions for an interview to be written up for Wilderness House Literary Review's summer issue 9/2. Here are the results of this interview:

There is good music. There is bad music. And there is great music. And solo jazz guitarist/guitar teacher Joe Weinberg has heard it all over the past 14 years. Yes, for the last 14 years, Weinberg has driven his car from student's house to student's house, much like the way a physician used to make house calls for sick patients, to teach guitar and to listen to the weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly improvements of his students' guitar skills.

Why does Weinberg teach guitar as a career? "Because it was just something that I always liked to do," Weinberg said.

Some students take to his guitar lessons easily; some students take a bit longer. But all of Joe Weinberg's students have the opportunity to learn from a highly skilled, highly motivating guitar teacher who takes the time to give each student individualized attention that helps the student better understand the world of guitar. Weinberg has approximately 50 students, an amount it took about three years at the beginning of his career to achieve. He teaches children through adults.

How does Weinberg do it? Perhaps it's through patience, understanding, and dedication. And he tries to teach his students the same philosophy. "I have one student – and there are a couple of them – who sticks out. This teenager lives in West Roxbury. I believe he is a sophomore in high school now. And he has really practiced a lot. He's really dedicated to it. He asks a lot of good questions. He can really play now. He can play in the style of Van Halen. I mean really play like that, and that's in the course of five or so years. I'm really impressed with his dedication," Weinberg said.

But students like this West Roxbury high schooler are rare. "A lot of people just want to do it for fun. It's fine. But some people really take it to a whole different level," he said. "Some people really work hard at it and really get it, too!"

While well-versed in the various genres of the guitar, Weinberg himself specializes in the jazz guitar. "I teach whatever style the students want to learn. Me, I'm a jazz guitarist. I certainly do have students study-

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ing jazz guitar. But I have people who are studying all different types of music because I think that the way you are going to advance is to learn how to play music you want to learn how to play.

Music is music: the elements of it, how it's written is always going to be the same - and how it's put together. But the biggest thing is applying those things to the kind of music you want to learn and you'll enjoy it more that way and will really start to understand things," he said.

Weinberg started playing the guitar 24 years ago. He plays no other musical instrument, though he likes to listen to many different kinds of music. His specialty is jazz guitar which he developed while a student in University of Arizona's Jazz Studies program. He studied classical guitar, too, while at college. "That's how I evolved playing finger style [on the guitar]. I developed that from playing Classical guitar...I wouldn't consider myself a Classical guitarist. I am definitely a jazz guitarist. There is a correct technique to play finger style, and I've adapted that for jazz guitar," he said.

Weinberg is not the first solo jazz guitarist to develop a finger style on the guitar. He would rather use his thumbnail than a thumb pick. It's simply a stylistic difference. He simply learned how to play with his actual thumbnail, so it's now a natural technique to use, Weinberg said.

He works with an Ephiphone Elitist 335 style guitar that is a semi-hollow body jazz guitar. "It's electric but the middle is solid block and the sides are hollow. It's a little different than a solid body guitar or a full hollow acoustic jazz guitar," he said.

Among the many jazz guitarists that Weinberg respects and learns from are Les Paul (1915 - 2009), George Van Eps (1913 - 1998) and Joe Pass (1929 - 1994). But the person who has influenced his jazz guitar career the greatest is a Sinatra stylist named Paul Elia (1959 -) whom he had met while in Arizona. "He does the Sinatra repertoire very well. I was a pretty good player at that point. This was about 15 or 16 years ago now. I really learned how to perform with a singer and how to pace things. That's actually where I started playing solo jazz guitarist the way I do now. I would play between his sets. Then we would do duets together," he said.

But that was before Weinberg started his teaching career. It was a different era in Weinberg's career. Now Weinberg enjoys teaching his guitar students. But what does Weinberg do when he is not working with his students? He certainly doesn't leave his guitar behind. In fact he can be heard performing as a recurring guest on Boston's WBZ's radio show, "The Jordan Rich Show" or playing regular gigs at Midway Restaurant in Dedham, Massachusetts, at Elks Lodge in Natick every month for Jazz Guitar Night there, or at Thelonious Monkfish in Cambridge, Massachusetts for their Sunday Jazz Brunch. He also performs at a lot of private parties and does fundraisers as well.

And what does the future for jazz guitarist Joe Weinberg look like? "I'd like to keep on doing what I'm doing," he said. "I actually like going to people's houses! I would like to get more into radio. You know, working with music or talk," Weinberg said.

As for the future of the guitar in both the teaching and professional

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world, Weinberg projects that “there are a lot of really good players that I see, students and other children, that are coming up.

The future seems strong for the guitar, as far as for the next generation,” he said.

Currently living in Brookline, Massachusetts, Weinberg is originally from Framingham, Massachusetts. He teaches guitar to students in Brookline, Randolph, Quincy, Framingham, Natick, Wellesley, Weston, Millbury, Douglas, and more.