

TUCK ANDRESS

Aural Report

BY JOHN SCHROETER

It is said that while an original can be hard to find, he is always easy to recognize. Such is the case with the instrumental half of the Tuck & Patti duo, Tuck Andress. To be sure, you can hear in his music shades of Wes Montgomery and George Benson, a good dose of R&B, as well as Tower of Power-flavored funk—even some Michael Hedges-inspired slapping and tapping. But no one has put it all together quite the way he has. And none performs the role of accompanist as he does. Tuck & Patti's latest release, *Learning How to Fly*, is evidence of the pair's ability to do just that. A case in point is Andress' solo instrumental cover of Earth, Wind & Fire's *Getaway*, which certainly puts their music on the right flight path.

I recently had the unforgettable experience of enjoying Tuck & Patti's performance in Denver, CO, with the majestic Rocky Mountains—replete with a spectacular lightning show—as a fitting backdrop to their outdoor stage. We found time before and after the concert to talk about the music.

On first blush, one could easily assume that reducing the music you arrange to guitar and voice is a radically minimalist approach. But with you two, it's complete. I don't miss the piano, bass, and drums. How do you and Patti pull it off?

When we first started, we had both come out of bands. It was really the first time for either of us to do a duo. At first, we really missed the bass, and we really missed the drums. This was before people started playing with sequencers and drum machines, so we wondered if I should play bass foot pedals and Patti play percussion. We were trying to think of ways to make it bigger and more complete by getting in everything that was missing. But each one of those tiny decisions was always in favor of the purist approach. So we finally decided that all these things we could have done, we wouldn't. And we got hooked on it. All the clicks weren't happening right at first—they didn't happen at the right place. But in time, I just trained myself and worked on that. I taught myself to tap my foot on two and four, for example, where in little clubs you might actually hear the foot taps. Patti was doing the same sort of thing, and as we succeeded more and more in doing that, we got to the point where we weren't just painfully aware of what was missing. It went from that to standing on its own and sounding complete. In the process, we increasingly stopped thinking about it. We were no longer worried about filling things up. We were willing to

leave space to let there be no bass, to let there be no chords. I quit being afraid to take guitar solos where everything would drop out. It was a real slow process, but it was entirely in the mind. It doesn't have anything to do with the music really, it has to do with your confidence. We've just grown to accept our little set of limitations as a universe. And whatever universe you live in, there's completion in there if you want to find it. There's infinity to explore, and you're always equally far from the goal.

So becoming a one-man orchestra was an outgrowth of necessity and a lot of trial and error over time?

Yes, and also a lot of experience on the gigs. Without that, it would all just be an academic exercise. I have typically practiced virtually forever on something, and gone out on a gig and discovered that it simply didn't work. That's the danger for solo classical guitar players, because they'll practice something until they get to the point where they can play exactly that one thing with exactly that dynamic shape, and exactly the same volume every time. But they won't have the flexibility to say, play the piece twice as loud, twice as soft, slower, faster, and to vary all these things. Here I am playing with a partner who didn't necessarily practice the same things I worked up. She may have it in mind to go in a different direction. The whole jazz, gospel, blues, and rock and roll underpinning of what we do is allowed to go anywhere, any time. That tripped me up so badly during the first few years that we were together, but it's really what brought out the flexibility in me. I would practice and practice knowing it was going to be a waste. I'd go out on the gig, it would all fall apart. I'd go back to the drawing board, and the same thing would happen over and over. We've done this so much, but in the process, I could never really analyze the things that would trip me up—the things that would cause there not to be exactly four beats in a measure because my hands wouldn't have quite made it right. So I would go home and practice again and there would be no problems. It's like an intermittent problem, and the only place it would show up would be on the gig. It would simply require going out and blowing it repeatedly. We allowed ourselves the freedom and

trust of each other to do that, to take chances, and do things that were unreliable. We were free to make mistakes. I think that was really critical in our development. Without that, I would have become much more conservative. We would have tended to work up an arrangement and play it the same way every time, instead of challenging each other.

I imagine things are more interesting that way.

Yeah. I imagine it would be really boring if we did everything the same way. Still, every night is full of surprises. It always feels like we're just about to fall off the tight rope.

Much of the material that you perform and record for solo guitar are covers. Do you prefer to arrange rather than to compose?

I've never been in any way a songwriter. There are a few original songs on *Reckless Precision*, but there're more an excuse to play a groove than anything harmonically interesting. Patti is very much the writer. I tend to be the facilitator, or her "human sequencer"—I'm the orchestra, and she's the orchestrator. That's essentially the way it works. I was always mystified how somebody could come up with progressions, or how somebody could come up with a song, whether it was a melody that fit with the chords. I understood them all; I could solo all day long and make up endless melodies, or just improvise chord changes galore—in all twelve keys—and did all kinds of work on every possible way to harmonize something. I'm really comfortable with all the elements of music, but not with writing a song or piece. It's a big mystery to me. I've always been a player, not a songwriter. I can tell a student, "Okay, here are your options," but when it comes down to how do you do it, it's still a mystery to me. I'm glad that Patti's a songwriter that I really like. It would be weird if she and I had completely different directions. But I just wholeheartedly embrace everything she writes.

The obvious thing that you bring to the party is your emulation of other instruments. You really capture their nuances, as well. That is,

the way a bass player might play a particular phrase, or what the drummer might do behind a given passage.



That's been a big specialty for me. I've seen a lot of people do the solo guitar thing, but for me, having come out of a lot of bands where *feel* was the whole thing, it had to feel right. And it doesn't feel right if there isn't a clear distinction between the parts. The groove's just not there. In an ensemble, there are all these micro elements that constitute staccato, attack, vibrato, or whatever it is. You want to have independence of all these things. So I've worked a lot on that. And it really involves both hands. For example, I play very much like a piano player would with my left hand. I really control what each part is doing. In other words, I don't just lay all my fingers down on a chord; they don't land until I'm about to sound that note. Likewise, I get off the notes that need to be staccato, and stay on the notes that need to

be legato. Some fingers will get right off, while another one stays on.

What are some of the elements of good accompaniment?

We decided a long time ago that we wanted to get to what the origin of accompaniment was. In the Latin, it means *to be with*. It's not to be back in the background. Both of us decided that we wanted to be *with* the other person. It's like a partnership. We're supporting each other and you're entirely there and entirely responsive to what the other person is doing, listening to them all the time. There are so many parallels to conversation: listening, not always thinking about what you're going to say, but always trying to give something to the other person, whether you're

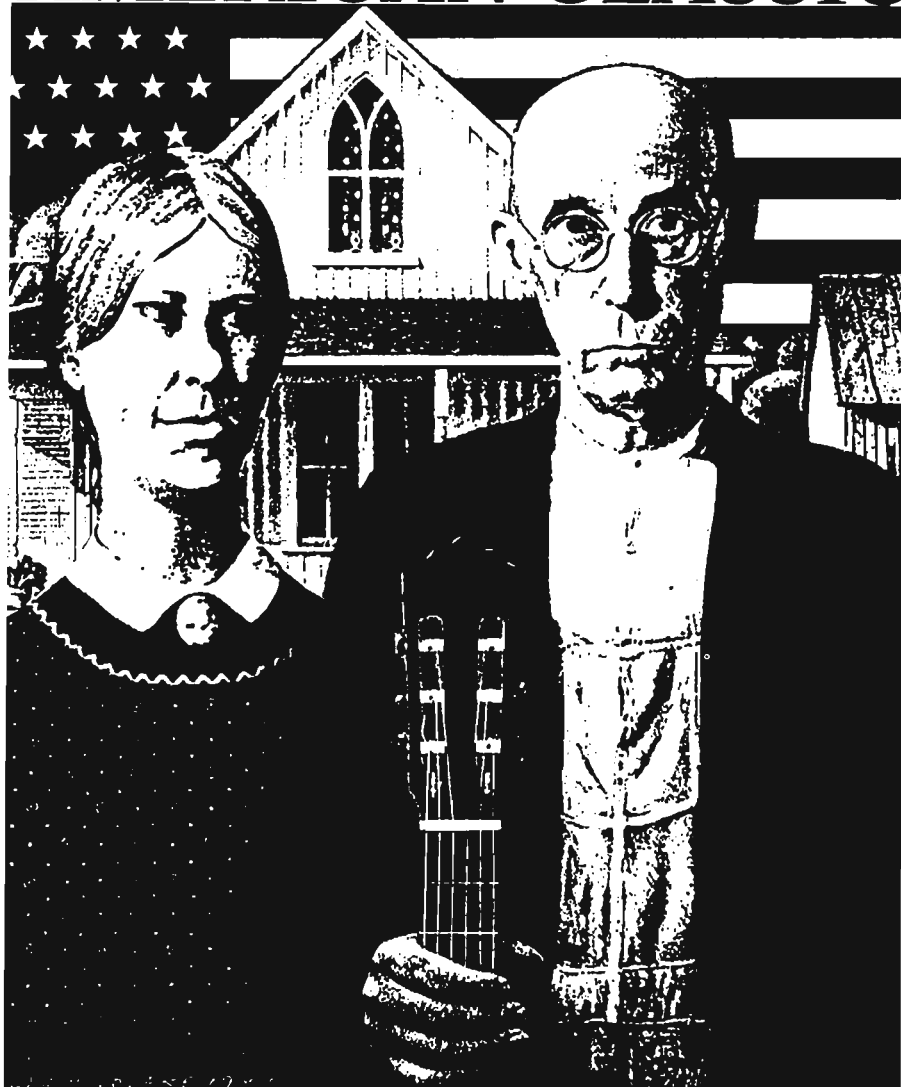
talking or they are. Of course, in a musical context, you're doing it at the same time. It would be an impossible dance in conversation, unless you scripted it out like an opera or something. But in music, it just works. People can be playing at the same time, sometimes notes that are dissonant, and you don't hear the dissonance. For us, it all comes down to being equal—not trying to overshadow the other person—but at the same time, not blending into the background. Of course I'm putting all this in terms of “nots”—“don't do this, don't do that.” It has to do with balance of those elements. I'm not a good accompanist unless I throw things at Patti here and there to trip her up. But at the same time, I'm not a good accompanist if I do that enough that it interferes with her train of thought, or derails it. I should be a good enough accompanist that I know when to move in one direction, as opposed to the other. I should be able to read her intent. All these impossible things! That's what you're dealing with in accompaniment.

On one hand, you want something that's making you feel completely safe and completely comfortable, but at the same time, terrified—running for your life! It's a complete paradox, but that's what you want to give to somebody else as an accompanist. Of course, it's best if the other person is doing the same thing for you.

Do you and Patti have disagreements over arrangements?

Oh yeah! We've got an ongoing one that's really comical. She's pretty much the arranger and orchestrator, and she'll come up with something that, on guitar, is just completely unplayable. And I'll say, “Well you don't understand.” It's Eb minor, and she wants to hear lots of open string harmonics at the same time as some sort of funky little popcorn guitar part in the middle of it, and some sustained notes on top. This is what she's hearing! She thinks like an orchestrator, and so she's hearing different instruments and colors, and textures, although she likes that fact that it reduces onto the guitar. I do too, but I hear the ones that I can do! She hears what she hears, and then I always lose the argument. I say it's impossible, and she says, “But I don't care, do it. And do it real quickly, too!” So I think of all the ways I can approach it, and go through each one. It forces me to stretch all the time, which is great. It's an ego challenge, and it's a great thing everyone should experience, because the reward is immense. A lot of the interesting textures on our songs are because of those exchanges. As albums go by, we've learned that we have that relationship, and that we should embrace it rather than fight it. A lot of the coolest textures come right from that basic argument. So I try not to argue as much anymore, and she tries to feel a little more sensitive to the fact that I feel under the gun. That's where a lot of the unusual techniques I've come up

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with have come from: problem solving. The challenge is we need to accomplish a particular sound. How are we going to do it?

Can you give us another example of a problem you've had to solve?

On the most recent album, *Learning How to Fly*, we worked through and came up with some voicings that we liked quite a bit. The song *Heaven Down Here*, involves some harmonics, and a lot of stretch chords, some of which are fairly difficult. And then Patti heard this "bouquet of vibrato" on all the chords. So on top of very difficult voicings—which I was just barely pulling off and managing to not get tremendous string noise when I got on and off of them, and getting to the point where I could do a legato move from one chord to the next—she said, "Well that's great, but without vibrato, it's not going to sing at all. It sounds stiff," which was true. I was hearing vibrato too, but as it turns out, I was simply doing this [shakes head back and forth to emulate vibrato] and creating the Doppler shift in my own experience. And it turned out that I've done that for years and didn't know it. I'd hold a chord, do absolutely nothing, and I'd hear this wavering. You'd see my head move at varying rates. Nobody else heard it, of course! So we actually isolated that during this last album. I had to train myself to stop moving my head to inject this thing that didn't exist, and start moving my fingers to do it. It brought up things like moving the whole neck back and forth, and different fingerings of chords. It was a real intense technical challenge for me—especially with high action, because you barely nail the chord and then to have to do this, and not have notes disappear while you're doing it.

Another challenge might be a voicing that she wants to hear, but I just don't see how you can do. Other times, it's simply a musical idea. I'll think of a stock harmony, but I've learned as a collaborator with her to be very careful to find out what she's hearing before I inflict my own thing on it. A lot of the time, she's hearing harmony, but the first thing she'll sing to me is a melody, which kind of gives us a structure and a sense of what the song is about lyrically. I used to kind of jump in, because I'm good at harmonizing a melody and I immediately come up with my own set of options. Now, though, I've learned to be more sensitive in reading what she's after. She's capable of singing the notes out of every chord she hears. More and more, she just sings her ideas to me. It's her best form of expression. Very often, she'll come up with a chord that will be a complete surprise to me. Once she comes up with it, it's like well yeah, of course. It's great. It's on the list of chords that contain that note; it's just that it would have been way down there—so far down that my filter wouldn't have even caught it, because maybe harmonically, it doesn't go with what my ear might be projecting on it.

It's all in the miracle of collaboration. It's a great thing to do. If you really embrace it, you get wonderfully challenged. And Patti has learned to sing along with what I play. She's learned to listen to the same imaginary drummer.

Have you always been a fingerstyle player?

No. Just about a year after we'd gotten together, I started playing fingerstyle. I was a pickstyle player, and I'm only now getting to the point where I am as good and as confident with fingers as I am with a pick. But in what we do, it was obvious from the beginning that I needed to get my fingers involved. At first, I was using a pick plus three fingers. After a while, I started palming the pick and trying to play fingerstyle—kind of weaning myself off the pick. And my technique was just atrocious. I had studied classical, but the classical technique I learned in a year of one guitar lesson a week was simply and absolutely ill-equipped to deal with the realities of playing with Patti. So that technique just went out the window. For years I was endlessly starting over. I studied flamenco players, bass players, football players, pool players—anybody who was accurately hitting something small with something not ideally suited for the task. The four most important things I learned were: swing from the knuckle, don't let the other joints break, swing through your entire range of motion in order to perfect the much smaller strokes you'll usually be making, and the better it looks in the mirror, the better it will probably sound and feel, even if you can't understand why.

It's almost a half of a life challenge just getting to the point where fingers sound good, and are likely to hit the right strings. I had this standard that I had to bring my fingers up to. So now, as a result, when I play lines, they don't sound tense. It's gotten to the point where now it's pretty reliable. I can sit down with a guitar and make music.

I see that you don't have much in the way of on nails on your right hand.

No, I cut them off in frustration a year or two in. With the steel strings, all the treble boost from the electronics combined with the irregularities in the nail are just horrible. I was sanding my nails in between every song, and they were still raspy. Now I like the sound better without them—but on the electric guitar. If I were playing an acoustic guitar, that would be tragic.

Do you play guitars other than your Gibson L5s?

Not really. I've always been an electric player. The L5s that I have are as close as I've gotten to an acoustic guitar. I came off of Les Pauls, Strats, Telecasters, and that kind of thing. I got an ES175 and an L5. I grew up seeing Wes Montgomery play, so by the time I had any chance of figuring out what kind of

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guitar I really wanted, it was already determined. I idolized Wes for so long, I had to have an L5. I literally built my style around that guitar. The lack of sustain and the shape of the neck on those particular guitars was uncomfortable to me at first, but my hands have adapted now. They're the most comfortable guitars I have.

Tell me a little more about the L5 you're traveling with.

It's a 1949 model. It has a Bartolini pickup in it that favors the treble side. The action is fairly high, and I've stuffed the body full of foam to help eliminate feedback on stage.

In your teaching capacity, what advice do you offer to the serious beginner, the intermediate player, and the advanced?

I would tend to say the same thing to everybody. And it's simplistic: follow your heart and you won't go wrong. That's your best hope. And it actually is something that makes a huge difference. For somebody that's just beginning to play, it means to play the music you love. Don't just play what discipline says you should play. For somebody that's somewhere along the path, it means also to learn to fall in love with the music you're playing, because somewhere along the line you're going to have to spend a lot of time playing scales and arpeggios and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 73

Man in the Mirror

Arranged and Transcribed by Tuck Andress

Working out the arrangement of *Man in the Mirror* was relatively easy. But it sounded very flat next to the original. It took me a while to figure out why: Michael Jackson's delivery was so dynamic that it would have been equally powerful and rhythmic even sung a cappella, whereas my melody was monotone by contrast. So I very carefully studied his phrasing, noticing how he enunciated, how one note in an otherwise legato passage would be very staccato, how he varied his attack, how he got from one note to another, how he breathed rhythmically, how he used vibrato, and how he used his trademark voice cracking to a high note (measure 6). I injected all this into the melody as much as I could, and was amazed at how much life it breathed into the arrangement. Try listening to the melody alone and you'll see what I mean.

You'll find the same thing is true of the groove. All the details that give life to the groove are notated, even though it makes the notation more dense. The transcription is scrupulously accurate; I've been over it with a fine-toothed comb. Of course the repeated section varies slightly in the details the second time through, but the differences are really insignificant. I hope you enjoy learning and playing this arrangement.

-Tuck Andress



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Man in the Mirror

Standard Tuning

Siedah Garrett and Glen Ballard
Originally recorded by Michael Jackson
Arr. Tuck Andress

10 10 10 10 10 10 12 15 12 15 12 14 15 14 12 15 14

Verse 1

Art. harm.

5 4 0 2 0 4 2 4 2 0 2 2 0 3 0 3 0 2 2 2 3 0 1 3 0 2 4

9 3 1 4 2 4 (0) 4 (0) 4 2 0 1 3 3 5 3 5 4 5 4 2 0 3 2 2 2 3 0 (0) 2

13 (2) 0 4 0 2 0 4 2 2 4 0 2 0 4 2 2 4 0 2 0 2 2 2 2 3 2 2 0 1 3 0 2 4

- (1) plucked i m i, strumming two strings with an upstroke of one finger
- (2) in mm.13-20, play G bass slightly muted with left hand thumb to suggest bass drum

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17 (3) (1) (1)

T
A
B

21 a mi Rasg. a mi Rasg. Rasg. Rasg.

T
A
B

25 (4)

T
A
B

29 Chorus Chorus Chorus

T
A
B

33 a mi Rasg. a mi Rasg. a mi Rasg.

T
A
B

(3) All 16ths in bass are played $\square \vee \square \vee$, with \square on the beat.

(4) 16th double stops are played with open hand $\square \square \vee \square \vee \square$.

1.

37

T 3 0 3 3 3 3 5 3 3 1 0 0 1 0 1 1 1

A 0 0 0 0 0 4 4 5 3 4 5 3 0 0 0 0 0 0

B 3 2 0 5 5 3 3 0 5 5 0 0 2 2

Verse 2

41

T 4 0 2 0 4 2 2 4 0 2 0 4 3 2 0 4 0 2 0 2 0 2 2 2 2 0 1 3

A 5 4 0 2 0 4 2 2 4 0 2 0 4 3 2 0 4 0 2 0 2 2 2 2 2 0 0 2 4

B 3 3 2 2 0 0 2 5 7 5 5 5 3 3 3 3 2 3 2 3 x x x

45

T 1 3 1 1 1 3 5 3 5 3 3 3 5 5 3 1 3 1 0 0

A 2 4 2 2 2 0 0 4 4 0 4 5 4 4 5 3 4 2 4 x 2 0 0

B 3 3 2 0 7 5 0 3 5 3 3 3 5 5 0 3 x 3 0 3 3 2

2.

49

T (3) 6 7 7 5 8 10 10 11 8 6 0 8 3 6 7 7 5 8 10

A (4) 4 4 6 8 7 7 7 7 9 10 10 x 9 7 0 9 XX 3 4 6 8 7 7 7 9

B 3 3 7 7 7 7 8 10 10 10 3 x 10 10 10 3 7 7 7 8

52

T 10 11 10 8 8 8 <12> <12> 7 8 6 5 8 8 5 8 8 8 10 6

A 9 10 9 9 9 9 0 <12> <12> 6 7 7 7 7 9 9 9 9 5 5

B 8 8 X 10 10 X 0 10 3 3 x 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 8 8 8 9 x 5

harm.

(5) The feel is like an 8th note open handed strum for the first three beats, and 16th note open strum for the fourth beat, except that upstrokes pluck rather than brush the strings. This gives rhythmic propulsion to the basic passage, which is:



(6) Light percussive downstrokes with m give the effect of the chord ringing through with added percussion.

(7) Like (6) with the addition of thumb collapsing onto and muting the bass string.

70

8va - - - 3

Rasg.

slap a m i slap etc.

4 4 4 4 4 5 6 6 6

4 4 4 6 7 3 3 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 5

73

8va - - -

repeat and fade

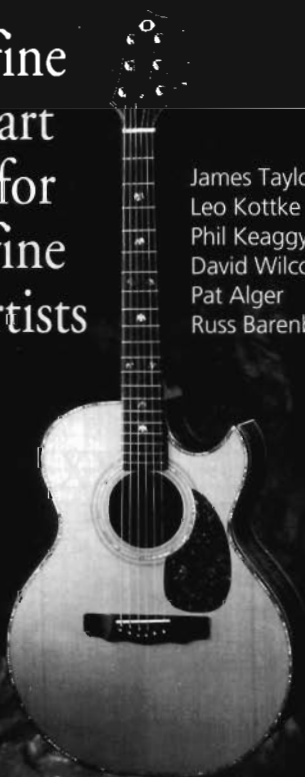
7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7

6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5

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