

## **Tuck & Patti 2007 biography:**

### **Tuck & Patti. You are either a fan...or you haven't heard them yet.**

Written by Carol Wright

For nearly three decades, this unique vocal/guitar jazz duo has cast its passionate musical spell worldwide, capturing the hearts of lovers, the respect of jazz buffs, and the jaw-dropping awe of guitarists.

With 29 years of performing together, and 26 years of marriage, the devotion forged by this extraordinary couple shows no sign of dimming from the pressure of familiarity. For them, this pressure creates more diamond than dust. Their instinct for refining their music, their technique and their career—their home studio makeover—their house and garden renovation—never wavers from their credo: It's not done if it's not from the heart. And what comes from the heart demands excellence.

Onstage and off, guitarist Tuck Andress and vocalist/arranger Patti Cathcart might, at first impression, strike you as an odd couple. The obvious difference in skin color is quickly overshadowed by the contrast of their personalities. Patti exudes the soft, centered yet powerful graciousness of a gospel singer; Tuck almost wears his brain on his skin, anticipating the thousands of musical decisions he'll have to send to his ten fingers during the course of a performance. Seeing the virtuosity and complexity of Tuck's guitar work, most are surprised to learn that Patti is the actual writer, arranger, and producer. Without even blinking, Tuck-the-problem-solver brags, "Patti writes and arranges; I am just the orchestra."

Beneath these layers, however, one hits shared bedrock, from the depth and extent of their musical training to their get-the-job-done focus to their absolute bond of partnership. Their time apart feeds their moments together. "When we're not actually recording an album," says Patti, "I am singing notes into my little recorder to give to Tuck once we get started."

Meanwhile, Tuck might update their database and website. For I Remember You, Tuck worked out parts drawn from a Count Basie recording, then painstakingly figured a way to play all the parts on his guitar. "We might not even use any of it," says Tuck, "You can't do it all at once, just on one guitar. But as a way to explore it, I would try to do it all at once. We hope we are suggesting it somehow."

But Tuck points out that it would be a mistake to too narrowly cast himself as the virtuoso and Patti as the expressive heart and motivator of the duo. "Flying fingers don't impress me much anymore. I'm much more interested in what I call 'soft virtuosity,' where the technique is usually invisible. It's micro-technique, where the subtleties are controlled, and that's where the heart of the music lies. Singers hopefully don't have visibly flying anything, so it's all about 'soft virtuosity.'

"Sometimes we have to record take after take to get the guitar the way we want it. But when I listen to Patti in each of those versions, I just hear variations on

mastery. If I didn't know how much virtuosity, how much discipline and control that requires, I'd just say it sounds effortless and natural and never question it. She caresses and crafts each note as if it were the only note, yet each take somehow tells a different story—I know she didn't practice all those details, so she's doing it on the fly. It takes massive technique to make a human body maintain perfect control of intonation, vibrato, dynamics, attack, breathing and all the other details that go into singing excellently, not to mention with heart-rending expression. I'm glad I don't have to try to do it; at least I can see if I'm at the right fret!"

Both Tuck and Patti were fortunate enough to be part of musical families where records of all types were spinning on the turntable. Tuck's father had been a leader of a jazz band in college, and his older sister inspired him with her studies of classical piano. "Little did I know that I was getting tremendous ear training that would serve me for a lifetime." Tuck also took piano lessons, as well as latching on to her love of pop music.

Patti seemed to be born singing. "As a little girl," she recalls, "instead of talking, I'd sing a running, stream-of-consciousness commentary on life. Many people in my family sang; I started singing in church, was leading youth choirs at age 10, and directing the adult choirs before I was 16." Patti also studied classical violin for 11 years, and in school was involved with school choirs, musicals, and various bands. She performed with many rock and jazz groups during the historic San Francisco sixties musical scene, and saw countless key performances by rock, blues, gospel and jazz greats of the day.

"That was one of the wonderful things about growing up in the Bay Area," she recalls. "I not only listened to and learned from, but got to see live a veritable who's who of every style of music: Tennessee Ernie Ford. Leonard Bernstein. Josephine Baker. The Beatles. Leontyne Price. Howling Wolf. Ella Fitzgerald. Sun Ra. Aretha Franklin jamming with Ray Charles and Billy Preston. Roland Kirk. The list goes on and on. It was an unbelievable education.

"The Fillmore, Avalon Ballroom, Carousel Ballroom, Keystone Korner and Winterland were like home to me," she continues. "Bill Graham always looked out for me. Jimi Hendrix called me 'Foxy Lady' on my birthday one year. I jammed with hundreds of musicians!"

While Patti was pretty "out there" from the beginning, a shy boy in Tulsa, inspired by hearing The Beatles and Rolling Stones, spent days in his room, "ruthlessly and systematically" learning everything he could about guitar playing, including working his way through all 400 of the orchestral chords, complex jazz chords in the appendix of the Mel Bay chord book. Tuck studied briefly with the Atkins-inspired guitarist Tommy Crook, but most of his learning was on his own. He played with garage rock bands and school big bands, and painstakingly learned songs from records (such as Wes Montgomery, George Benson, John Coltrane, Art Tatum, Red Garland, Thelonius Monk "and a host of piano players," not to mention blues, rock, R&B; and country guitarists like B. B. King, Amos Garrett, Cornell Dupree, Eric Gale and Odell Stokes). Most important, Tuck progressed through "a great deal of practice and experimentation. From an early point the guitar and I were inseparable. I would conduct my life with a guitar strapped on and my fingers active."

Tuck, too, was influenced by Jimi Hendrix, but the rocker's sonic textures were so explosive, that Hendrix actually drove Tuck deeper into jazz. It was two years before he felt confident enough to figure out Hendrix's songs and style. The sixties scene brought Tuck to the West Coast, and in 1970, he enrolled as a music major at Stanford University.

During breaks he tried out the LA studio scene. He was given the opportunity to be guitarist for the Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour, but decided to reject this commercial detour. Later he spent four years with the GAP Band, his "graduate degree in soul music." Meanwhile he doggedly continued studying recordings of guitarists of every style, developing a knack for playing the guitar as several instruments at once. "I learned how to vary the volume and tone of each part independently of the others," Tuck explains, "not knowing that this would become an essential ingredient of the fingerstyle guitar I would take up when Patti and I got together."

For years, Tuck and Patti played in various Bay Area bands without meeting. Tuck, introspective and unambitious, contrasted with Patti's persona of bandleader, one who would and did jam with every hot musician in the area. In 1978, Tuck was already guitarist for a cover band when Patti walked in to audition. "Within a few seconds of hearing her sing," recalls Tuck, "I knew I had found my lifetime musical partner."

"It was that immediate for me too," says Patti. "I immediately knew that the band 'wasn't happening,' but that I was going to steal the guy playing guitar in the corner!" The two both explain that musicians always have this radar going, sweeping for their musical soulmate, that special someone that they can communicate and collaborate with. They stayed with the band for a few months, but really got to know each other as they shared a ride to rehearsals. They became best friends. They plotted another course. Jammed with other musicians.

They realized they both had such extensive musical backgrounds that they knew hundreds of songs in common. They formed a duo, guitar and vocalist. Though Joe Pass and Ella Fitzgerald were an inspiration and model, landing live gigs with this sparse instrumentation took a little persuasion. Once booked, however, the rooms quickly filled with repeat fans. "We had never had so much fun, nor been so challenged," says Tuck. "We went to play at a venue and forgot to take breaks."

For this duo, from then on, there has not been a break. Friendship and collaboration grew to love, and the two were married in 1981. Their recording career took off when Windham Hill Jazz signed them for 1988's groundbreaking *Tears of Joy*. This and several other Windham Hill albums put them on the map, and they've been solidifying their career, their musical conversation, their technique, and their love together ever since.

Tuck and Patti now have their own recording studio, as well as their own record label, T&P; Records, which licenses their CDs to major labels for distribution around the world. They tour Asia and Europe so much that they know that home is with each other, regardless of location. They are looking forward to, at long last, taking occasional time off from touring to teach at their Bay Area home, as well as doing

workshops while on tour. A concert DVD, Tuck & Patti Live in Holland, with a behind-the-scenes documentary, As We Travel Round this Circle, was released in 2005.

Their new album, I Remember You, was released through Universal Music October 10, 2007 in Asia, and through Artist Garage in the US in September, 2008. What's on the album? Love songs of course, from the Great American Songbook, inspired by Ella Fitzgerald and Joe Pass. "They are gorgeous tunes, with grand lyrics," shares Patti. "And they sing unabashedly, unapologetically, about love."

"To have every song feel like it's a dream to play," says Tuck. "It doesn't happen for every performer, but for us, it happens."

Smiling, Patti adds, "You know, I think this conversation is going to last a lifetime."

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