

STEVE WARINER c.g.p.

My Tribute to Chet Atkins

You can't **Out-Chet Chet**; let me say that right up front! That's *definitely* not what I'm attempting to do here. Everyone knows there was, and will be only one Chet Atkins. This is simply my way of honoring and paying homage to the genius and talent of the man who, in my opinion, is the greatest and most influential guitarist on the planet. He not only paved the way, but he also knocked the doors down for all who followed. I'll guarantee you somewhere around the world right now, guitarists are working on his licks. As awesome as he was on the guitar, I think he was an even greater person. I feel so blessed to have called him my friend.

c.g. p.

The abbreviation "c.g.p." stands for "Certified Guitar Player," a title that Chet would bestow on a few guitar pickers that he knew. There were only four he officially made c.g.p.'s: John Knowles, Jerry Reed, Tommy Emmanuel, and me. I am so honored that Chet gave me that title!

I was thrilled when I learned I was nominated for a Grammy[®] in 1996 for my work on *No More Mister Nice Guy* (which Chet played on). Then my elation went the other way when I learned I would be up against my buddy Chet!

My wife and I went to New York to the show at Madison Square Garden, and Chet won, of course. (He had left me a message on my answering machine saying, "I voted for you to win; besides, I've already got 16 of 'em," then laughed.)

A week or so later, Chet called and insisted I come to one of his Monday shows he was doing at Café Milano in downtown Nashville. I noticed a lot of cameras there that night for some reason. He brought me up and not only "loaned" me one of his Grammy Awards, but officially made me a c.g.p. with a beautiful plaque that I still have hanging in my studio to this day! He was nothing but class.

Some may know that Chet started out as a fiddler. His first job was with Jumpin' Bill Carlisle and Archie Campbell on the KNOX Mid-Day Merry-Go-'Round radio show in Knoxville. He later played with the Carter Family playing guitar and some fiddle on the radio.

Carlisle used to laugh and facetiously say, "Chet was a terrible fiddler; had to fire him!" Then he flashed that big smile and said, "But he sure could play that guitar!" I've played with Chet when he fiddled, and I've heard recordings of his early days as a fiddler. As you might imagine, he was *very* good.

LEAVIN' LUTTRELL

For me, this cut represents Chet's formative days before he left his hometown of Luttrell, Tennessee. I can only imagine the hours and hours he must have put into practicing and honing that precision thumb style. Not long after Chet had passed away, my wife Caryn and I were in east Tennessee and drove through Luttrell, which is just outside Knoxville. We called Leona, Chet's wife, and said, "Guess where we're calling from? A little town called Luttrell!"

She laughed and said, "What in the world are you doin' there?"

Written by Steve Wariner
(Drums - Terry Wariner; Bass - Steve Wariner)

JOHN HENRY

My dad has talked for years about how he went to see Chet and the Carter Family on the 2nd floor above Hankla's auto parts store on the square of his hometown of Jamestown, Kentucky, sometime in the late '40s. Dad said it cost 45 cents to get in, and he made sure to get there early to secure a place right down front to "catch" a few licks from Chet. The Carters featured Chet playing solo in the show, and the song he played was "John Henry." I asked Dad, "How many licks *did* you catch that night?"

"Not a damn one," he said with a laugh.

My version was inspired by Dad's story and the imagination of how Chet "might have, sort of, kind of" done it in the late '40s. I find it interesting that there was also an Atkins family friend who Chet was close to named John Henry.

Public Domain
(Drums - Paul Leim; Bass - David Hungate)

(BACK HOME AGAIN IN) INDIANA

Chet recorded his original version in September of the year I was born, 1954. It featured Dale Potter on fiddle, Bud Isaacs on steel, and 'Papa' John Gordy on piano. Bob Moore was on bass and Buddy Harman on drums. My version features two of my great friends--Jeff Guernsey on fiddle and mandolin (a tip of the hat to Chet's brother-in-law, the great Jethro Burns), and Chet's longtime pianist and arranger, Tony Migliore. I'm playing bass in addition to guitar, and my brother Terry is playing drums.

Being a Hoosier from Noblesville, Indiana, I obviously love this one! When I was younger, I always thought it was cool that Chet's brother Lowell lived in nearby Frankfort, Indiana. Chet and I talked about that when I first started working with him. I got to know Lowell and his wife later down the line.

Written by Ballard MacDonald and James F. Hanley
(Fiddle/mandolin - Jeff Guernsey; Drums - Terry Wariner; Bass/acoustic guitar - Steve Wariner; Piano - Tony Migliore)

LEONA

What can I say? Chet's wife Leona is my sweetheart and dear friend. She has always been so kind to me. I love that she always calls me "Stevie." I wrote this just for her and thought it only fitting that Bergen White arrange the strings. He did so much work with Chet over the years and coincidentally is their neighbor. Chet and Leona were married in 1946.

Written by Steve Wariner

(Drums - Paul Leim; Bass - David Hungate; Piano - Randy Hart; Strings – Carl Gorodetzky and the Nashville String Machine, arranged by D. Bergen White)

BLUE ANGEL

I first heard "Blue Angel" from one of Dad's Chet albums from the '60s. I remember being floored the first time I heard it. I later saw Antenor and Natalicio Lima, the brothers from the rain forests of Brazil who wrote it, on *The Tonight Show*. They were Los Indios Tabajaras, and they were performing in their ceremonial Indian costume complete with headdress. I knew they were friends of Chet. Many years later I told myself I was going to learn "Blue Angel." I used it as my guitar warm-up exercise for years on the road before I would go on. Recently I found a cassette tape recording from the '80s of Chet coaching me through "Blue Angel." He recorded it on the small cassette player in his office. Priceless.

Written by Natalicio and Antenor Lima

(Bass/acoustic guitar/castinets - Steve Wariner; Percussion - Ron Gannaway)

REEDING OUT LOUD

How could you talk of people who worked with Chet and not think of the amazing Jerry Reed? I truly think he didn't have a clue about how awesome he was. The night Chet passed away, Jerry and I had an incredible conversation about Chester. Actually, he talked and I listened for about 45 minutes solid. Wish I could have recorded that! I'm so glad I got to know Jerry like I did. He truly was remarkable. This is my nod to him... and the "chief."

Written by Steve Wariner

(Drums - Paul Leim; Bass - David Hungate; Rhodes piano - Randy Hart; Electric guitar – Paul Yandell)

PRODUCER'S MEDLEY

When I toured with Chet, he would play a medley of some of the hits he produced. It boggled my mind all the great artists Chet produced hits for! He called it the "Producer's Medley", and in typical Chet fashion, talked about how, "every once in a while, we would go in the studio and get lucky." The medley includes hits from Perry Como, Jim Reeves, The Browns, Don Gibson, Al Hirt, The Everly Brothers, Skeeter

Davis and Jerry Reed. An awesome body of work! It's hard to imagine Chet never recorded this medley. I have a T.V. show clip of Chet performing it, as well as some of our old charts that I found in my bass case, so I recorded it! Just think--he didn't even include Elvis' "Heartbreak Hotel" (which he co-produced with then RCA president Steve Sholes).

"And I Love You So" - Written by Don McLean

"Welcome to My World" - Written by John Hathcock and Ray Winkler

"The Three Bells" – Original French words by Bert Reisfeld, music by Jean Villard; English words added by Dick Manning

"I Can't Stop Loving You" – Written by Don Gibson

"Java" Freddy Friday, Allan Toussaint, and Alvin Tyler

"Let It Be Me" – French version by Gilbert Bécaud, Mann Curtis and Pierre Delanoë; English lyrics by Jill Corey

"End of the World" – Written by Arthur Kent and Sylvia Dee

"When You're Hot You're Hot" – Written by Jerry Reed

(Drums - Paul Leim; Bass - David Hungate; Piano/vibes - Randy Hart; Flute - Steve Wariner; Strings –Carl Gorodetzky and the Nashville String Machine, arranged by D. Bergen White)

TUNED IN

I love his jazzy era when Chet paired up with some of the greatest guitarists from *all* genres like George Benson, Earle Klugh, Larry Carlton, and many more. He was comfortable in so many worlds. I suppose in a way, this track tries to illustrate that and how Chet would use the gut string in direct contrast with his electric to build some wonderful textures, while at the same time maintaining the simplicity of melody. Invariably any time I played guitar on stage around Chet, he would smile and whisper in my ear, "Scat this next part." I *had* to include a touch of scat singing/playing for him.

Written by Steve Wariner

(Drums/percussion - Ron Gannaway; Bass - Steve Wariner; Keys – Randy Hart)

6120

Guitarists everywhere know, but for those who don't, 6120 is one of the Gretsch model guitars that Chet played and made hugely famous. I played my own '58 6120 on this track. My friend Jimmy Mattingly helped me write this one and is featured on fiddle.

You'll notice, too, that I played bass on this and a few others on this project. When I traveled and played bass for Chet, I remember vividly one night on stage in Anchorage when he sauntered over to my side during a piano solo. He leaned over and whispered, "Has anyone ever told you that you were the world's greatest bass player?" I whispered *no* in response. He then said, "Have you ever wondered why?"

Written by Steve Wariner and Jimmy Mattingly

(Drums/percussion - Ron Gannaway; Bass - Steve Wariner; Fiddle - Jimmy Mattingly)

CHET'S GUITAR

For some reason, this harkens back musically to the early Elvis/Chet relationship, “Heartbreak Hotel,” and rockabilly time. Rick Carnes and I wrote this after Chet’s passing in 2001. I decided to put the B-bender guitar on there at the last minute as a contrast to the hard drivin’, “Travis-y” thumb stuff. I love the lyric about playing every lick that I stole from Chet. Chet used to say, “It’s *borrowed*, Steve!” I’m not so sure I agree.

Written by Steve Wariner and Rick Carnes
(Drums - Paul Leim; Bass - David Hungate; Piano - Tony Migliore)

SILENT STRINGS

About midway through this project, I was working one day with my buddy Kent Blazy. I played him some roughs, and he reminded me that we had discussed *silent strings* for a song idea about Chet after he passed away. We were saying that somewhere as we speak, his guitar must be very lonesome. I’m so glad Kent brought up those old ideas. We jumped on it at that point, and I feel it’s an appropriate closer for my album to honor Chet. I think the lyrics and the Del Vecchio guitar speak for themselves.

Written by Steve Wariner and Kent Blazy
(Guitars – Steve Wariner)

Strings arranged by D. Bergen White
Performed by Carl Gorodetzky and the Nashville String Machine