



# Mark Wingfield

BY BARRY CLEVELAND

**BRITISH GUITARIST MARK WINGFIELD'S** playing and compositions may be grounded in jazz and contemporary classical music, but his musical interests extend to the four corners of the earth. He has collaborated with artists from Africa, India, Turkey, Japan, and Lebanon, as well as participating in the groundbreaking Res Rocket Surfers project that linked players globally online via a MIDI-based software application in the late '90s.

Wingfield's compositions possess the harmonic authority of "serious" music, while at the same time avoiding the gratuitous dissonance often associated with it, and his lyrical melody lines weave in and out of those sophisticated tonalities with the deftness of a London cabbie negotiating midtown traffic.

Wingfield has received commissions from several of Europe and England's most prestigious institutions and festivals, and he has released four albums. On his latest CD, *Three Windows* [Dark Energy], he blends his extensive tonal palette with those of renowned harpsichordist Jane Chapman and celebrated saxophonist Iain Ballamy to create one of the most consistently brilliant and forward-thinking collaborations in years. And he does all of this without using amps, effects boxes, or even the magnetic pickups on his guitar.

**You get a lot of great "guitar" tones, but none are created using amps. How is this possible?**

For years, I had these sounds in my head that I was unable to get from conventional gear. Even with huge racks of

effects and all kinds of amps and pedals and synthesizers, I was never able to get the sounds I was imagining until I discovered the Roland VG-88 V-Guitar System. It allows me to really get in deep and design sounds from scratch—exactly the way I want them to be—but it always sounds very guitar-y. Equally importantly is that the VG-88 captures absolutely everything I do in a non-linear way. It tracks all of the changes in my playing dynamics just like a great amp would. A lot of that nuance was getting lost with all of the rack processors and chains of effects boxes, because, by the time I got a sound that was rich enough—and had enough sustain—I'd lost the details. I'd also do all kinds of subtle things that you just wouldn't hear because there were too many layers of stuff covering them up. The VG-88 also has a huge dynamic range, so I can play very quietly, or very loudly, without losing any of that richness.

**To what extent are you getting articulation and ornamentation from your fingers, as opposed to using electronics to shape your sounds?**

Nearly everything is done with my fingers. On some patches, there is a bit of formant filtering—which shapes the beginning of the notes—but it is very subtle.

**Are you using any of the VG-88's tuning options?**

No. I did toy with the idea of using a tuning that was in all fourths, but I decided I'd better not [laughs].

**Do you play only with a pick, or do you also use your fingers?**

When I'm playing single notes, it is

mainly with a plectrum—though my fingers often get involved here and there on slow phrases. When playing chords, I often pluck the strings with my fingers to get all of the notes simultaneously.

**What other devices do you use?**

I have two VG-88s, because when I do solo-guitar spots I'll often set up a pad with one of them. I'll fade in notes that will sustain, building up a chord, and then I'll switch to the other VG-88 and solo over the pad. It's a loop in a sense, but not necessarily a rhythmical loop. I also have a Roland GR-33 Guitar Synthesizer that I sometimes use for pad sounds, as well as a few switching pedals.

**What do you use in place of an amp when performing live?**

I run everything into a MOTU 828mkII that I use as a live mixer. I also use a pair of Mackie SRM450 powered monitors whenever possible, in addition to sending a feed to the house P.A. system. Before, I had to hire amps all over the place, and then deal with whatever I got—which was a pain.

**What guitar do you play?**

It's an all-maple Patrick Eggle LA, hand-built in Britain. Mine was one of the first models they built, and it has since been discontinued. I particularly like the locking tremolo system. It stays in tune really well, while maintaining the nice tone of a non-tremolo guitar.

**What kind of pickups does it have?**

The original pickup is in the middle, and there are Seymour Duncan Hot Rails and Jazz pickups in the neck and bridge slots, along with the Roland GK-2



Divided Pickup. The wiring is customized, so I can get any combination of pickups, but I don't actually use them anymore, now that I'm using the VG-88 and the GR-33 sounds exclusively.

**Are there any particular strings that work best with the GK-2?**

No. I tend to use Ernie Ball strings, gauged .009-.042, but I will sometimes use D'Addarios.

**You have collaborated with musicians from**

**many traditions. How did you go about finding a common language with those artists?**

These days, I find that it's surprisingly easy, because even musicians who are playing more traditional styles of music have grown up listening to a lot of the same things Westerners have. As a result, we have an enormous amount in common.

**So you're not really working within the specific traditions?**

Definitely not, but I have used traditional

material when composing. For example, I transcribed some African tribal music recorded 30 or 40 years ago that has people chanting and playing percussion, and I used the rhythms as a starting point for several compositions. There's also a composition based on the melody of an 18th-Century Indian folk song, and another based on a transcription somebody else did of traditional African thumb-piano music. All of those pieces may be found on *Three Windows*.

**What about going for the microtonal aspects of Turkish and Indian music?**

I've read quite a few books about Indian music, and I've talked to people about it, but I haven't approached microtonal playing as a discipline. I think the Western tones are enough to keep me busy. Of course, we all do microtonal stuff in our own way—particularly on the guitar.

**The pitch bends you play on "Prelude 1" sound very Indian. What are you doing there?**

That's a mixture of left and right hands. Much of it is done with the tremolo arm, but a lot of it is sliding up and down the string, even though it sounds like bending.

**What fuels your approach to improvisation?**

One of the things I'm really interested in is trying to find the areas that are completely outside the normal tonal system, but still sound musical. For example, on "Bitches Brew," Miles plays some lines that don't fit within the normal Western tonal system, but they have their own internal musical logic, and they make a lot of sense if you look at them as a *structure*. If you analyze what he is doing from a conventional perspective, then playing a minor third against a major-7 chord doesn't make any sense harmonically. But another way of looking at the line he plays is as a series of major thirds stacked consecutively one upon the other, which creates a symmetrical pattern. To me that was just revelatory, and I thought, "Oh my god, that's the most amazing sound I've ever heard."

**What role do influences play in finding your own sound?**

I feel that the more diverse your influences are, the easier it is for you to do something original. When I was really young, I read a quote from Keith Jarrett that I didn't understand until many years later, when I realized that everything you play must have come from somewhere. He pointed out that a lot of young players try to sound original by erasing everything that sounds like someone else, but that when they've finished, they find they've erased themselves. ■