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On a Purple Note

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On a purple note

A passion for jazz helps this guitarist find his own beat

“I honestly think I was born to play guitar.”

That’s how Wayne Goins describes his beginning in jazz. It all started when he picked up a guitar as a child. That early start has led to 26 albums, six books, hundreds of performances and a job as director of the recognized jazz studies program at Kansas State University.

“I can’t remember not playing guitar,” said Goins, who grew up listening to blues music from his harmonicist father, but was bitten by the jazz bug when he reached college.

Now Goins is an accomplished recording artist, award-winning author, composer, teacher and, most of all, a guitarist.

Pure guitar

Goins is known as a versatile musician who plays in the styles of jazz, blues, rock, funk and reggae. While he primarily plays guitar, he also can play drums, piano and bass and can teach trumpet, trombone and saxophone.

Goins is no stranger to the recording studio and the publishing industry. Some of his undertakings include:

- An award-winning book, “A Biography of Charlie Christian: Jazz Guitar’s King of Swing.”

- His music performed on Broadway with Pearl Cleage in the play “Blues for an Alabama Sky.”
- Recording six albums through his own label called Little Apple Records, and recording more than 20 albums for Atlanta-based Ichiban Records.

Now, Goins is busy recording a new album — “Seven Steps to Evans” — with guitar arrangements of famous piano tunes from Bill Evans. The album features a rhythm section of Goins’ students. Goins will soon publish his sixth book, “Blues All Day Long,” which focuses on blues guitarist Jimmy Rogers, the lesser-known right-hand man to famous blues guitarist Muddy Waters.

“I just wanted to talk about Jimmy Rogers’ story, because without him, the sound that Muddy Waters got probably would not have been possible,” Goins said.

Publications and organizations know of Goins’ talent and regularly seek his expertise. This year, Goins became a contributing editor for Memphis-based Pure Guitar, an online magazine and offshoot of Guitar Player magazine. Goins submits monthly articles, interviews, reviews, videos or guitar arrangements to be published on pureguitar.com.

He already has published a variety of magazine content:

- A video to demonstrate the right-hand style of guitar great Wes Montgomery in a tune called “Blues for Brother Reggie.”
- His list of 10 must-hear jazz albums.
- A book review of John Stein’s “Jazz Standards for Solo Guitar.”

Goins plans future content and videos on additional songs by Bill Evans and Wes Montgomery.

Jazz studies

While Goins enjoys recording and writing, he considers his 15-year involvement in the Kansas State University jazz program a chance for him to inspire the next Miles Davis or Pat Metheny.

“The biggest kick is that you touch students’ lives and you watch them grow and go on to do great things,” Goins said. “It makes you proud to know you had something to do with that.”

The two-year program lets students from any discipline minor in jazz studies. Students take jazz improvisation and theory courses as well as perform in big bands and combos. The program has two big bands — Lab A and Concert Jazz Ensemble — and five combos: Latin Jazz Ensemble, Swing Machine, House Wreckers, Mambo Combo and Combo Nation.

“What sets our jazz program apart is that we give students much more one-on-one time,” Goins said. “We give them an opportunity to perform and advance their musical abilities so they are much more prepared to go out in the professional world by the time they leave our institution than a lot of other schools.”

As director, Goins conducts ensembles and combos. He has taught jazz improvisation, jazz theory and jazz history courses and offers a graduate course for students to develop their teaching skills — the subject of his book — “The Jazz Band Director’s Handbook: A Guide for Success.” Goins also teaches guitar classes. He offers private lessons and provides students with opportunities to perform at gigs and even make appearances on his albums.

“I get to play music every day,” Goins said. “I feel like I’m one of the luckiest people in the world because I get to do what I always dreamed of doing, which is playing guitar.”

By Jennifer Tidball, Communications and Marketing

