

SOUNDPAGE COMPETITION WINNER!



JUL. '88

Guitar Player

JERRY

GARCIA

P. 48

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THE WINNER!

OKAY, WE WERE WRONG. WE thought it was going to be easy. Sure, we figured it would be time-consuming, and we thought some of it would be tedious, but at least it would be no problem to weed out the vast majority of submissions in short order. After all, there couldn't be that many *really good* ones. Right?

Wrong. There were piles of good ones. Stacks, mounds. They came from Sweden, Argentina, Denmark, Brazil, the United Kingdom, India—dozens of countries around the globe, from the Antigua Islands to Poland, from Australia to Israel. Tapes began arriving only days after the January '88 issue's announcement of our first-ever Readers Soundpage Competition, and they continued to flood our offices right up until the February 20 deadline, when the volume had mushroomed to about 70 a day.

Rules had been spelled out in January's issue: The competition was open to "amateurs, semi-pros, or aspiring pros just starting their careers" (details and definitions were specified). The judges—*Guitar Player's* in-house editorial staff—would be looking for "talent, musical skills, taste, and creativity." We'd consider all styles, solo and ensemble performances, and any of several instruments—electric guitar, nylon-string, steel-string, guitar synth, or electric bass.

Out in the warehouse, incoming tapes were loaded into big plastic bulk-mail boxes, and then the boxes were stacked in our editorial area. In late February, each full-time editor hauled down a box at random, sealed himself in his office, and hunkered down with his cassette deck. The judging was underway.

Each judge listened to his tapes in private, all the way through (no fast-forwards), and divided the submissions into "possible keeper" and "no" piles. The eliminated tapes were then forwarded to a second editor who listened to them all over again. The second judge could return any entry to the keeper group for further consid-



BRADLEY JONES

Of the hundreds of tapes submitted for the Soundpage contest, it might well have been the worst recorded. But underneath the rumble and hiss of a cheap tape, Brad Jones' talent was unmistakable. His blazing, clearly articulated lines were delivered with power and imagination over intricate counter-rhythms. The tape was enough to convince *Guitar Player's* editors that he deserved to be heard.

The 28-year-old self-taught guitarist

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DON PETERSEN

Guitar Player '88 READERS SOUNDPAGE COMPETITION

eration by still more judges; thus, no tapes were eliminated until two editors had independently agreed to do so. While each entry was reviewed by at least two judges, many were reviewed by three or more, some by the whole staff—even before the final selection stage.

There were surprises. The most startling of all was simply the consistently high quality of the submissions. In brief, we were blown away. Some judges had predicted that perhaps only 15% or 20% of the tapes would survive the first listen, but in some offices the early "no" piles weren't much bigger than the "possible" piles. We knew we were in for a long, tough competition.

As the accumulated judging passed the 30-hour mark, several trends became apparent. We expected to hear plenty of speed demons with astonishing chops, and we did, but we also encountered reader/guitarists with impressive taste, a sophisticated understanding of high-tech instruments and effects, and an inventive approach to the recording process, particularly in the home studio. (One especially resourceful reader recorded his rhythm guitar on a "barely working boombox" and then played it back while recording his lead guitar, along with the rhythm, on a second boombox at the other end of an empty warehouse at 3:00 A.M.)

Stylistic diversity was even broader than anticipated. We encountered less Van Halen-style two-hand tapping than we'd expected, but plenty of double-tracked, harmonized, machine-gun picking of the Malmsteen/MacAlpine school of "classically influenced" metal. Another large segment played a slick fusion of jazz, rock, and funk. There were some blues players, of course, although fewer than expected, and we heard some Atkins-style country, some mainstream jazz, and bits of pop, classical, acoustic slide, new age, avant-garde/experimental, Hawaiian, and more. Many of the contestants were acoustic musicians, representing several styles on both nylon-



Runner-up
**JAMES
BLACKTHORNE**

Guitar Player's Soundpage Competition runner-up James Blackthorne terms his music "neo-impressionistic jazz-rock," but that doesn't quite describe the compelling, unpredictable, manic improvisation exhibited on "SPAK." Accompanied by bandmates drummer Keith Wald and bassist Dave Enos, he pulls out all of the stops for a dizzying display of the unconventional, which caught the ear of *Guitar Player's* editors and earned him second-place honors.

On "SPAK" James employs a Jim Kelly FACS amp, a Marshall 4x12 bottom,

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Presented to
BRADLEY JONES
The Winner
1988
Readers Soundpage
Competition

**Guitar
Player**
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READERS SOUNDPAGE

string and steel-string, and we heard from some knock-out bassists, too. Many players were of professional caliber, and frankly, a few were better than some recognized names.

Finally, on Wednesday, March 30, the staff met to select the winner. We asked the receptionist to hold all the calls, and we closed the door. Each of the five judges brought his finalists, about 30 tapes in all. There was no particular method or order to the listening; volunteers would simply cue up a tape and let 'er rip, and we'd listen, make comments, take notes. After an hour or so of listening to examples of techno-flash fusion, killer-chops metal, commercial pop-rock, and other gems, we encountered two submissions that were decidedly outside the Competition's rock/fusion/pop mainstream.

The first of these eleventh-hour finalists was Bradley Jones. Unlike the polished, high-tech productions we'd grown accustomed to, his tape sounded so muffled and crude that, frankly, some of us chuckled. But not for long. Here was a monster player with chops galore, great ideas, and an encyclopedic reservoir of guitaristic influences. No effects, no tricks, no studio, just a player with a cheap guitar, a cheap tape recorder, and massive talent. The low-tech, high-technique Bradley Jones won *Guitar Player's* Readers Soundpage Competition on the first ballot. (Later, his muffled tape was replaced with a studio version of the same songs, which you'll hear on the Soundpage's first two cuts.)

The runner-up tape, by James Blackthorne, was even further afield from the mainstream. In fact, it's far afield from most music made on this planet. We found it to be alarming (even disturbing), yet compelling. After a few minutes it grew on us, and once hooked, we wanted to experience again its demented charm and over-the-top abandon. (Incidentally, although Blackthorne is from the city where our offices are located, none of the staffers had ever met him or heard of him prior to receiving his entry.)

We planned to feature only one guitarist on the Soundpage, but after hearing the finalists we decided that we had to showcase at least a bit of their diversity, so we made arrangements for a special disc with enough space to feature the runner-up. It would be hard to imagine two more different players than Jones and Blackthorne, and yet both managed to distance themselves from the pack through their "talent, musical skills, taste, and creativity." And since all of the finalists were so extraordinary, we decided to publish a list of Honorable Mentions; they'll receive official citations from *Guitar Player*.

Both the winner and the runner-up will receive 100 free copies of the July issue (with Soundpages). Furthermore, since the Competition's announcement in January, Kevin H. Carlson, Sales/Marketing Manager of Georgia Record Pressing, agreed that his company would donate a special prize: Winner Bradley Jones will receive 500 free 12" records, to be made from the tape of his choice. Georgia Record Pressing [262 Rio Cir., Decatur, GA 30030; (404) 373-2673] provides complete manufacturing for the music

HONORABLE MENTIONS

- Drew Andriani, Rockville, MD
Cliff Brown, Seattle, WA
Buddy Canada, Crockett, TX
Russell Chan, North Hollywood, CA
Mark Cole, Metairie, LA
Tom Conway, Kihei, HI
Kevin Cooke, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Federico Cordero, Puerto Rico
Marc Dane, New York, NY
Brian Davidson, Cleveland, OH
Victor De Jesus, Bronx, NY
Robbie Dummitt, Vinton, VA
Randy Feifer, College Park, MD
Beaver Felton, Savannah, GA
James Finley, Mountain View, CA
Manuel Franco, Oakland, CA
Dean Granros, Eden Prairie, MN
Dave Hasinfelt, Las Vegas, NV
Vito Lafata, Detroit, MI
Rik Lawhorne, Fredericksburg, VA
Bengt Ljungberger, Stockholm, Sweden
Walter Anthony Michalowski, Hammond, IN
Rick Nordine, Marysville, CA
Robert Orr, Auburn, AL
Greg Passler, Framingham, MA
Sameer Phaterpekar, Bombay, India
Mike Raymond, Kings Park, NY
Frank Silano, Ossining, NY
Ron Silva, Los Lunas, NM
Gary Skopick, Chicago, IL
Jeffrey Robert Smith, Sycamore, IL
Mark Sorah, Dayton, OH
Bill Sutherland, Louisville, KY
Kenneth Svensson, Hisings Backa, Sweden
Henry Van Dijk, Nijmegen, Holland
Scott Van Zen, Los Angeles, CA
Phil Zuckerman, Winchester, VA

industry, and they will contribute the mastering, plating, pressing, labels, test pressings, sleeves, and stock record jackets.

Another bonus: Eva-Tone, manufacturer of our Soundpages, has agreed to donate a Gold Soundpage, similar to the one pictured here, to the winner. The disc is gold-plated, and the award is matted, framed, and specially inscribed.

Finally, the caliber of our finalists' playing was so high that we'll be sending a tape of the winner, runner-up, and all Honorable Mentions to record company executives Miles Copeland of IRS Records, Mark Varney of Legato Records, and Mike Varney of Shrapnel Records.

For us, the whole process was exhausting but enlightening and fun, and we gained an insight into you, our readers—an appreciation of you—that we simply could not have acquired any other way. To the entrants: We knew you'd be good, but we didn't know you'd be *that* good. Thanks for sharing your music with us. Oh, yes—when it was all over, we changed the name from The Readers Soundpage Competition to the *First Annual Readers Soundpage Competition*. See you next year.

—Tom Wheeler

BRADLEY JONES

has been playing since age nine, primarily for tips and in dinner club settings. A native of Ames, Iowa, Brad has been living in Goodview, Virginia, a small town 35 miles outside of Roanoke, for the last two years. He sorts bottles at the local Pepsi Cola plant to pay the rent. Several nights a week he plays for diners at a local steak house, mixing his extraordinary country-flavored stylings with original music and classical compositions. His primary instrument is a beat-up \$125.00 Yamaha classical guitar that he's carried around for years.

Brad entered the competition on a last-second whim, recording three tunes in 15 minutes on a 16-year-old, 2-track, JVC reel-to-reel tape recorder in his bedroom. He then used his boom box to transfer them to a K-Mart cassette. We received his tape in the last mail on the last day of the contest. Fortunately, he was in the process of recording a studio-quality demo tape at the time he entered, and we were able to obtain masters from those sessions for our Soundpage. The demo's tunes, an original composition, "Back Porch Boogie," and a scintillating treatment of the old country standard "Salty Dog Blues," are presented on our Soundpage. Both were recorded on the Yamaha.

"Back Porch Boogie" is simply one guitar with no overdubbing or punches. On "Salty Dog," Brad flatpicks a brilliant counter-rhythm against his amazing 5-finger fingerpicking for breathtaking effect. If you're interested in hearing more of Brad's playing, you can order his 10-song cassette titled *Back Porch Boogie* for \$7.95 from Flat Five Press, Box 8127, Roanoke, VA 24014.

JAMES BLACKTHORNE

an ADA Stereo Tapped Delay, A Roland SDE-3000 Digital Delay, A Lexicon PCM 70 digital effects processor, and a Charvel Strat-style guitar outfitted with a Seymour Duncan 59N pickup. Blackthorne attended the Berklee College of Music in 1980, he studied rhythm, scales, and modes at the Ali Akbar Khan College of Northern Indian Classical Music, and has played with Ali Akbar's son, Ashish. Blackthorne's influences include East Indian music, Igor Stravinsky, and John Coltrane. ■

Guitar
Player
Magazine

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BRAD JONES: 1. "Back Porch Boogie"
BRAD JONES: 2. "Salty Dog Blues"
JAMES BLACKTHORNE: 3. "SPAK"

SOUNDPAGE™ #46
JULY 1988

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