

# STRUNZ & FARAH

## BIOSKETCH

Performing together since 1979, Strunz & Farah are the innovators of an entirely new expression for the acoustic guitar. Decades ahead of their time, they originated an exotic style that now is widely followed. From Costa Rica and Iran respectively, Jorge Strunz and Ardeshir Farah have brought the cultural riches of their native lands into their highly virtuosic, rhythmic, and improvisation-rich original instrumental compositions, profoundly influencing guitarists worldwide. Their meeting in 1979 marked the first time that Latin American and Middle Eastern music came together on the guitar. They remain the undisputed masters of the form they created.

Jorge Strunz was born in Costa Rica to a family with lineage that includes a past Costa Rican president on one side and one of Simón Bolívar's favorite lieutenants on the other. Given his first guitar at age 6, he grew up also in Colombia, Mexico, Spain, England and Canada, studying and playing flamenco and classical guitar. He performed flamenco guitar professionally as a teenager, accompanying Spanish dancers and singers. He then turned to focus more on his own Latin American roots, Caribbean and Latin folk, and later, jazz. Jorge single-handedly invented a new style of Latin guitar playing that is an original synthesis of hand techniques from flamenco, Latin folk and classical guitar with state-of-the art high-speed linear plectrum playing.

Ardeshir Farah was raised in a beautiful old house in Iran that echoed with the sounds of the violin of his uncle, who performed with the Teheran Symphony. Later, he moved to England for schooling. He played guitar since childhood, focusing on popular music and improvisation. He has performed and recorded extensively with many of the top expatriate Persian singers and musicians in the US who fled Iran after the Revolution. Ardeshir was the first to use Middle Eastern inflections in a contemporary guitar setting. His style has a unique exoticism.

The travels of his diplomat father finally brought Jorge to the United States, while Ardeshir arrived as a student of architecture. Ardeshir came to see Jorge perform with his Latin jazz group Caldera (4 albums on Capitol), and decided to meet him. The day the two guitarists met, it was instantly obvious that they were brothers of the guitar from opposite ends of the earth, even playing Czardas (a devilishly fast Hungarian Gypsy piece) flawlessly in harmony at top speed. They quickly prepared a repertoire, began performing, and recorded their first project, *Mosaico* in 1980 (self-produced). Although record companies at that time were not ready for this exotic new music ("where are we going to sell this, Timbuktu?"), jazz radio embraced it and world/jazz industry pioneer Richard Bock got the duo signed to the prestigious jazz label Milestone for whom they recorded their revolutionary albums *Frontera*, 1983 and *Guitarras*, 1984. These records defined world music on guitar years before the "world music" category even existed.

The intimate audiophile recording *Misterio* was put out by Waterlily Acoustics /AudioQuest in 1989. Following this came the phenomenally successful recordings *Primal Magic* (1990) and *Américas* (1992), put out by Mesa/Atlantic, which won Billboard's World Music Album of the Year and a Grammy nomination, respectively, and spent months in the top of Billboard's World Music charts. In 1994 and in 1998, Jorge received two Presidential awards from the government of Costa Rica for his cultural contributions.

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The artists then started their own record company, Selva (which means "jungle" in Spanish), as an artist-friendly alternative and put out *Heat of the Sun*, (top 10 Billboard World Music chart), *Live*, the artists' first live performance recording, and *Wild Muse*. They won back the rights to their hit recordings, *Primal Magic* and *Américas*, which have been re-released on Selva. The popular *Best of Strunz & Farah* (2000) and *Stringweave* (2001), an elegantly intimate recording graced with many superb guest musicians, followed. Subsequent recordings include *Rio de Colores* (2003), a river of colors — a diversity of sounds and musicians, *Strunz & Farah In Performance*, the duo's first DVD-video release, live in an intimate, acoustic setting, *Zona Tórrida* (2004), a more complex and progressive recording, *Desert Guitars* (2005), which pulls together S&F's Middle Eastern works, and *Jungle Guitars* (2006), a sister compilation of cuts inspired by the neotropical rainforests.

S&F's most recent recording, *Fantaseo*, is a journey through folk and urbane Latin America, rustic Iran, and includes an appreciative nod to American jazz, albeit underpinned with their intrinsic ethnic touch.

In all of these recordings (which have sold well over a million), one can savor the fruits of one of the most unique yet enduring and harmonious musical collaborations in the world of the guitar.

## The Music

S&F's music is perhaps best described as original international acoustic instrumental improvisational guitar music, world guitar, or ethnojazz. Their music is saturated with their cultural roots: Afro-Caribbean, Latin American folk, flamenco and Middle Eastern music, and draws heavily from the jazz concept of improvisation.

Although influenced by flamenco, the music is distinct from it. There is a phenomenon in flamenco called "ida y vuelta" ("roundtrip"), which describes the borrowing of Latin American elements into Spanish flamenco, which had originally influenced the music of the New World via the "Conquista" (conquest). Rumba, colombianas, guajira and milonga are examples of Latin American inspirations borrowed by flamenco; however, in Latin America, these sources represent entire worlds of music, richer in variety than their borrowed counterparts. The same can be said of Middle Eastern music.

The "ida y vuelta" nature of S&F's relationship to flamenco is exemplified by the influence they have had upon flamencos such as popular flamenco group Ketama's borrowing of the theme from S&F's 1983 piece "Quetzal" (from *Frontera*) for their hit "Vente pa Madrid", among others.

Strunz & Farah are widely respected in the flamenco community. They count as friends Paco de Lucia (who once suggested Jorge to John McLaughlin as a replacement for Al DiMeola in the guitar trio), Pepe Habichuela, Agustín Carbonell "El Bola", Jose Miguel Carmona (of Ketama), Gerardo Nuñez, Ramón Jimenez, and Rafael Riqueni, many of whom they have also played with.

Other renowned world, jazz and classical musicians they have recorded with include Dr. L. Subramaniam, Ashish Khan, Heyadeh, Manoochehr Sadeghi, Bijan Mortazavi, Jihad Racy, Edwin Colón Zayas, Stanley Clarke, Hubert Laws, and Liona Boyd. They have also recorded with Joan Baez, and have recorded and performed often with Jackson Browne.

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