

Vibe legend Gary Burton and his quartet play Penn Sunday

By Rob Nagy
21st Century Media

A jazz pioneer recognized for his four-mallet technique, Gary Burton has been long heralded as one of the finest vibraphonists in modern music. With 60 solo albums under his belt, and virtually countless collaborative and guest appearances with other artists, Burton has been a prolific contributor to the jazz world. A renowned master of his instrument for decades, Burton has raised the bar for all aspiring musicians.

In celebration of his 70th year, Burton has released his long awaited biography, "Learning To Listen; The Jazz Journey of Gary Burton."

"I started thinking about it as long as 10 years ago," says Burton. "I began writing little notes to myself on cards, things that I thought would be interesting to write about or that (would be) a good story. Then I started to write in chronological order to see what it looked like.

I didn't make much progress for the first 10 years, or so it seemed. Something changed when I retired from Berklee. It's like I entered a new phase in my life. Now my story had a beginning a middle and what I could see was the end phase of my career and my life. Suddenly, a lot of things came into focus."

"One of the things you experience in this jazz business is a lot of colorful characters," reflects Burton. "I tried to capture the ones that I knew personally. So I put in these portraits of Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Chick Corea, Pat Metheny, Miles Davis, etc. I knew these people in one fashion or another. When you work on a project like this, a lot of memories come back to you. So that was interesting as well. It got me back in touch with my history. I'm really happy with the final result."

More recently, he formed "The New Gary Burton Quartet," which includes Julian Lage (guitar), Scott Colley (bass) and Antonio Sanchez (drums). Following the release of their debut album, "Common Ground" (2011), they are about to issue a follow-up entitled "Guided Tour."

"I started this band 3 years ago, not with the intention of it being a permanent thing," says Burton. "It was just for one year and to do a month long tour in Europe. By the time we came back, I was really struck by what chemistry these four players had. That's something that only comes along randomly in your career. I booked studio time, and we made our first record together. Then we did more touring. It was time to make a second record and keep this going. We've already toured Eu-

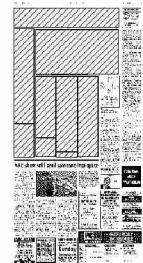
rope this spring, and now we're doing the U.S. this fall."

Possessing perfect pitch as a child before he even played an instrument, Burton attended the Berklee College of Music in the early 60's. Then, the former student became an active member of the college staff. From 1971 to 2004 he served Berklee, first as a professor, then Dean and, ultimately, Executive Vice President.

Early on in Burton's career, saxophone legend and good friend Boots Randolph encouraged him to make a move to the musically rich environment of Nashville. From there, Burton went on to record with music luminaries Chet Atkins, Hank Garland and Floyd Cramer and scores of household names in the world of jazz and beyond.

After signing a recording contract with RCA Records, Burton released his debut album in 1961, "New Vibe Man in Town." Through out the remainder of the 60's and 70's Burton toured and recorded with the likes of George Shearing, Stan Getz, Larry Coryell, John Scofield and Pat Metheny, the latter of whom he introduced to a larger audience.

In 1968, after becoming the youngest musician ever to be named "Jazzman of the Year," Burton could lay claim to membership in the "club" of the musical elite.



Four decades ago, Burton embarked on a musical journey with fellow jazz legend and friend Chick Corea. Popularizing the jazz duet performance, their recordings have garnered a pair of Grammy awards in 1972, 1979, 1981, 1997, 1999, 2009 and, most recently, in 2013 for "Hot House." In all, Burton has accumulated an impressive 21 Grammy nominations and 7 Grammy awards during his career.

"Awards come and go, but there's something about the Grammy's," says Burton. "They are voted by your peers. It's the other musicians that are at your level that are making these choices. So when you win one, it really means something.

"I've been lucky to win them spread out over my whole career, which says to me that I just didn't have one overnight success. Somewhere along the way, I've had a real continuity in my career and sustained my success."

"I'm at a stage now where I feel like I've accomplished all the things I set out to do," reflects Burton. "My goal now is to maintain this level of musicianship. I'm beginning to look at my whole career as this kind of continuum of a body of work. I'm pretty proud of how it has turned out."



The Gary Burton Quartet performs Sunday Oct. 6 at 7 p.m. at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts Zellerbach Theatre, located at 3680 Walnut St., Philadelphia, PA 19104-6219, Tickets are \$20 to \$55 and can be purchased on line at www.Annenbergcenter.org or by calling 215-898-3910.